



# The Melody Man

Joe Davis and the New York Music Scene, 1916–1978

**Bruce Bastin** with Kip Lornell

# The Melody Man

**American Made Music Series**

Advisory Board

---

David Evans, General Editor

Barry Jean Ancelet

Edward A. Berlin

Joyce J. Bolden

Rob Bowman

Susan C. Cook

Curtis Ellison

William Ferris

John Edward Hasse

Kip Lornell

Bill Malone

Eddie S. Meadows

Manuel H. Peña

David Sanjek

Wayne D. Shirley

Robert Walser

# The Melody Man

Joe Davis and the New York Music Scene, 1916–1978

Bruce Bastin with Kip Lornell

University Press of Mississippi / Jackson

www.upress.state.ms.us

The University Press of Mississippi is a member  
of the Association of American University Presses.

Copyright © 2012 by University Press of Mississippi  
All rights reserved  
Manufactured in the United States of America

First printing 2012

∞

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bastin, Bruce, 1938–

The melody man : Joe Davis and the New York music scene,  
1916-1978 / Bruce Bastin ; with Kip Lornell.  
pages ; cm. — (American made music series)  
Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-61703-276-9 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-  
1-61703-277-6 (ebook) 1. Davis, Joe, 1896–1978. 2. Music  
publishers—United States—Biography. 3. Sound recording  
executives and producers—United States—Biography. 4.  
Composers—United States—Biography. 5. Sound recording  
industry—New York (State)—New York. I. Lornell, Kip, 1953– II.  
Title.

ML427.D38B38 2012

781.64092—dc23

[B]

2011052812

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

# Contents

vii.....	Preface to the New Edition by Kip Lornell
xi.....	Preface
xv.....	Acknowledgments
xvii.....	Prelude
3 .....	<i>Chapter 1</i> "That's Got 'Em"
36.....	<i>Chapter 2</i> The Melody Man
55.....	<i>Chapter 3</i> Fats Comes Aboard
102.....	<i>Chapter 4</i> How Joe Davis Did Business
132.....	<i>Chapter 5</i> The Gennett Connection
156.....	<i>Chapter 6</i> God Bless Our New President
174.....	<i>Chapter 7</i> Caribbean Music and Albums
200 .....	<i>Chapter 8</i> Back to the Brill Building
217 .....	<i>Chapter 9</i> The Deep River Boys
233.....	<i>Chapter 10</i> Jay-Dee Records and Otis Blackwell
262.....	<i>Chapter 11</i> Listen to Dr. Jive
287.....	<i>Chapter 12</i> I Learned a Lesson I'll Never Forget
305.....	Tune Title Index
318.....	Name and Subject Index

*This page intentionally left blank*

## Preface to the New Edition

I first encountered *Never Sell a Copyright* the year after Storyville published it in 1989. I'll confess to reading through it rather quickly and then occasionally referring to it over the years. Largely, however, like most of my books, *Never Sell a Copyright* sat quietly in my bookshelf.

In early July of 2009 I spent an afternoon visiting with Bruce Bastin, whom I first met in 1973, at his home in sunny southern England. My family and I were in the UK for my niece's wedding and I spent the afternoon swapping stories with Bruce, who only lives about twenty-five miles from my sister's home in Lewes. During the course of our multifaceted conversations, I mentioned how valuable a resource his Joe Davis book had proven to be over the years. Bruce downplayed its significance, though he lamented the fact that so many copies had languished in the basement of Laurie Wright, the late editor of *Storyville* magazine and books. I knew the book was all but impossible to find in the United States and remained largely unknown except to a handful of discographers and others interested in sheet music publishing, copyright, and the history of the recording industry. *Never Sell a Copyright* contained so much original material derived from the files of Joe Davis, as well as important information about Davis himself, that I told Bruce that it deserved a second life with a scholarly publisher located outside of the UK.

I first brought the project to the University Press of Mississippi in late fall 2009 and within six months the American Made Music series editor Dr. David Evans and the assistant director/editor-in-chief Craig Gill jointly approached me for help in preparing *Never Sell a Copyright* for an American audience in the twenty-first century. After reading the Press's assessment, Bruce and I discussed what needed to be done and by November 2010 I had signed onto the project. Now, for the first time, with a new title and many small updates and revisions, *The Melody Man: Joe Davis and the New York Music Scene, 1916–1978* is readily available to the larger audience it deserves.

This revised edition largely remains the work of Bruce Bastin, who sifted through all of Joe Davis's files in order to write the version Storyville published in 1989. My job in the second edition is trifold. I've updated the



manuscript to include information about, for example, the 2002 passing of songwriter and singer Otis Blackwell. The form and scope of the book remains true to the first edition, though I have grouped Bruce's short chapters into longer chapters and lightly edited the original prose. Thirdly, I have added more contextual information on topics such as the development of the race record industry that will help the nonspecialist reader to better understand Joe Davis's life and work.

Davis's biography remains somewhat incomplete largely because no interviews with him exist. Bob Koester, who came into the business around the time that Davis was in his fourth decade of selling American music, met Joe on several occasions. He wrote:

In 1954 I briefly met with Joe in St. Louis as he was showing his new Lee Castle Dixieland 10" LP to distributors. Joe made important recordings by modern jazz pianist Elmo Hope, but his main business was releasing "party" records that were inescapably displayed in the windows of stores in Times Square. These songs were, not surprisingly, similar to some of the blues he had dealt with in the 1920s. It may be possible that some of Joe's old copyrights got a rerun. Most of the singers did not do justice to the risqué but usually witty lyrics. By today's standards, these lyrics were very tame, of course.

In the mid-1960s, I walked down 48th Street in New York after visiting a Delmark distributor and noticed a small sign bearing the name "Joe Davis" on the open door of a storefront. A short man in his 70s was supervising two young teenagers in a stockroom crammed with LPs, 45s in boxes, and vintage albums of old 78s. The short man turned out to be Joe Davis. I knew he had started the Beacon and Celebrity lines in the very early 1940s just prior to the first national Petrillo ban. At first Joe said he was too busy to talk, but we talked for a little over an hour. After explaining the Copyright Act, he said Beacon and Celebrity were his two publishing companies and that in pursuance of his business, he had promoted many recordings including many by jazz and blues artists. He casually grabbed one of the albums and showed me a flag-label Columbia, for example. In 1934 he talked the Victor label into changing Thomas Waller's group name to Fats Waller and his Rhythm. ([http://www.starrgennett.org/stories/articles/joe\\_davis\\_gennett.htm](http://www.starrgennett.org/stories/articles/joe_davis_gennett.htm))

Koester's recollections, while helpful and interesting, are tantalizing brief. They further underscore the principal challenge in writing *The Melody Man: Joe Davis and the New York Music Scene, 1916–1978*: no one sat down and recorded a series of detailed interviews with Davis about his life and business practices. If these oral histories existed, then this book would be far different. Bruce primarily based the book on the files he found in Texas and the few articles that mentioned Davis. *The Melody Man: Joe Davis and the New York Music Scene, 1916–1978*, therefore, remains limited by primary resources that, while often rich in certain details (particularly the references to session personnel from Davis's files) also comes with gaps, most notably the last twenty years of his life. But remember this: had Bruce Bastin not contacted Joe Davis's daughter, who thankfully kept her father's files, *The Melody Man: Joe Davis and the New York Music Scene, 1916–1978* wouldn't exist and we would know far less not only about Joe Davis but also about all of the music and musicians his life touched.

—kip lornell

August 2011

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Preface

Some time ago a British jazz critic who probably didn't know better criticized the reissue of a Charlie Ventura album in a jazz magazine that should have known better, on the grounds that Ventura was not a "great." The same forces that led me to reissue a very pleasant Charlie Ventura album led me to write this book. The music world is made up mostly of people who are not in themselves "great" but who enable "greats" to emerge.

For every new book on Duke Ellington or Louis Armstrong we need one on the scene that enabled them to be "great." The New York jazz scene has been well portrayed for many years in Sam Charters's and Len Kunstadt's book, *Jazz: A History of the New York Scene* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), but you will search there without success for reference to Joseph M. Davis. The same oversight plagues other, more recent, books about vernacular music in New York City, such as Tony Fletcher's *All Hopped Up and Ready to Go: Music from the Streets of New York 1927–77* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007). It is perhaps not my place to assess if he should have been included, but I have taken it upon myself to make available in this book some of the material I have uncovered about him in the hope that someone else does that.

Unaware that Joe Davis had died the previous year, I first made contact with his daughter Lucille Davis Bell in 1979, in order to release sides by Gabriel Brown for my Flyright label. This initial deal resulted in a number of albums of Davis-released material, by which time it had become apparent that his estate contained previously unreleased takes among his materials, as well as file data and photographs. I paid my first visit to Texas in 1982 to find a veritable treasure trove of materials, and soon became fascinated by this man of whom I'd heard little but who had been so involved with "my" music for years. His daughter received the suggestion of a book about him with cooperation and delight. She could not have been more helpful, for I was allowed complete access to her father's files. One evening at her dinner table, her husband, Morton Bell, asked me if I'd ever met Joe Davis, whom he had known for many years. I replied that I hadn't

but, having spent so much time releasing his material and researching his work, I actually felt that I knew him. Smiling, he asked me what sort of a man I thought Joe Davis had been. When I'd finished, the smile had gone and he looked thoughtful. "Yes," he said. "You really did know him." I'd like to think that I have come close and that some of that understanding is transmitted from this book.

The danger of working closely on one tree is that one loses sense of the forest. I've tried to avoid that by placing Davis in his own setting from basically his own materials. Some of what he retained must have been important to him; some seems important to me, but might have been more or less so to him. We will never know now. I've tried to keep in mind that people of varied interests might wish to know more about him; most of these will be interested in Davis's involvement with blues, jazz, Fats Waller, or rhythm 'n' blues. Possibly someone wished to know about his Spanish recordings, but no one asked.

My research findings have been far from complete. Huge gaps existed in his files and his scrapbooks were sporadic and left out whole years (and decades later on). I could have spent weeks plowing through his files and those of the Library of Congress and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) to find out the titles of all his published songs, and—possibly—when they were discarded. It seemed neither sensible nor affordable nor practical. I wanted to write a book that might whet an appetite or two and perhaps prod someone else with specialist knowledge to set it in print. The assessment of what might or might not have been important is a very personal matter. Some information is missing because I simply have none. *Storyville* magazine once asked in an editorial if people who had information on Joe Davis would send it to me. Kindly, John Chilton and Les Airey did so. They were alone. Doubtless there are others—some of whom did not reply to specific letters of inquiry—who could have added more. They have every right not to do so, but I trust they won't complain because of absences.

—Bruce Bastin

December 1989 and July 2011

I have been able to add little new in the twenty years since the initial publication of this book, apart from lightly expanding the Caribbean music chapter. Kip Lornell has freshened the script, brought certain matters more into focus, and amended a few Englishisms.

—Bruce Bastin

August 2011

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Acknowledgments

Bruce Bastin

Above all I must thank Lucille Davis Bell, for her support and encouragement throughout, not least for her open access to her father's memories.

The following have all generously provided information: Les Airey, Mark Berresford, Alain Boulanger, John Chilton, John H. Cowley, Ate van Delden, Roger Pryor Dodge, Colin Escott, Donn Fileti, Ray Funk, Marv Goldberg, Karl Gert zur Heide, Tad Jones, Dan Kochakian, Howard Kozy, Eric LeBlanc, George Moonoogian, Joe Moore, Tony Russell, Brian Rust, Howard Rye, Frank Scott, Jeff Tarrer, Frank Weston, and Laurie Wright.

Also Consulted (if not cited in the notes):

Bruce Bastin: *Red River Blues* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).  
R. M. W. Dixon and J. Godrich: *Blues & Gospel Records 1902–1943*, 3rd ed. (Chigwell, Essex, England: Storyville Publications, 1982).

Galen Gart: *First Pressings: Rock History as Chronicled in Billboard Magazine*: Vol. 1 (1948–1950); Vol. 2 (1951–1952), Vol. 3 (1953) (Milford, NH: Big Nickel Publications, 1986).

Roger D. Kinkle: *The Complete Encyclopedia of Popular Music and Jazz 1900–1950* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1974).

W. T. “Ed” Kirkeby: *Ain’t Misbehavin* (London: Jazz Book Club, 1967).

Dan Mahony: *Columbia 13/14000-D Series* (Stanhope, NJ: Walter C. Allen Productions, 1961). *Jazz Records 1897–1942*, 5th ed. (Chigwell, Essex, England: Storyville Publications, 1983).

Brian Rust with Allen G. Debus: *The Complete Entertainment Discography* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1973).

Brian Rust and Sandy Forbes: *British Dance Bands on Record 1911–1945* (Harrow, Middlesex, England: General Gramophone Publications, 1987).

Richard Sears: *V-Discs: A History and Discography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).



Klaus Stratemann: *Negro Bands on Film: Vol. 1, Big Bands 1928–1950* (Lubeck, West Germany: Uhle & Kleimann, 1981).

Laurie Wright: *Mr. Jelly Lord*, (Chigwell, Essex, England: Storyville Publications, 1980).

and the following articles:

Ray Astbury: “You Guys in the Union?” *Blues & Rhythm* 42 (February 1989).

Robert L. Brackney: “The Musical Legacy of Andy Razaf (1895–1973),” *Storyville* 50.

and various editions of the following magazines:

*Jazz Monthly*, *Record Research*, *Storyville*.

Kip Lornell

This revision benefited from the University Press of Mississippi’s belief in the worthiness of this project, the assistance of Jay Bruder at several turns, the ongoing support of my family (especially my longtime spouse, Kim), and Bruce’s patience as I worked to gently reshape and update his important work on Joe Davis.

# Prelude

## “West 55th Street Blues”

The “Roaring Twenties,” the “Jazz Era,” or the “Age of Prohibition,” three of the terms often applied to the 1920s, describe a decade of profound changes that transformed American music. New styles, such as blues and jazz, and new artists like Louis Armstrong, Bing Crosby, Duke Ellington, and Bessie Smith first rose to commercial and popular significance during the 1920s. Among all the thousands of new artists and groups that played and sang, the majority of their names mean little to most of us in the twenty-first century.

The history of popular music in America has been revisited and revised time and again. Currently hundreds of colleges and universities in the United States now teach courses with titles like “American Popular Music” and the “History of Rock ‘n’ Roll.” The same trend is true for the history and the evolution of jazz. As we look back and uncover some overlooked corner and add more to the overall picture, it becomes ever less simple to grasp.

By the close of the 1920s the “Race Market” (packaging and selling music to an African American audience) in recordings and sheet music was firmly established and key studies—such as Tom Lord, *Clarence Williams* (Storyville Publications, 1979), or Paul Oliver, *Barrelhouse Blues: Location Recording and the Early Traditions of the Blues* (Basic Civitas Books, 2009)—enable us to follow its progress. The roles of black entrepreneurs, like Williams and W. C. Handy, have at least been assumed, though still not fully understood and appreciated.

In New York City, just west of Broadway, home of Tin Pan Alley, lay a completely equipped acoustic recording studio at 240 West 55th Street. This studio hosted the New York City sessions of the Canadian Ajax label. Probably sometime in May 1924—one record from the session was advertised in the *Chicago Defender* of July 5—a small group gathered in the studio to accompany an artist new to recording. To judge from the nearly score of releases recorded over a ten-month period, Helen Gross quickly established herself as one the label’s most important names.

Her July 1924 recording of Tom Delaney's "I Wanna Jazz Some More," about "Miss Susan Green from New Orleans," who "was a dancing chile," sounds no better or no worse than hundreds of other songs from the period. It was far less commercially successful for Delaney than his earlier huge success with "Down Home Blues," which was so important to the young Ethel Waters. For this session Ajax used just two black "house" musicians: clarinetist Bob Fuller and pianist Louis Hooper.

Delaney's song was published by Joe Davis Music Co., located at nearby 1658 Broadway. Davis apparently was on hand for the session and probably immediately set off that same night with the newly cut masters for the Ajax label's Canadian headquarters in Lachine, Quebec. Throughout the summer of 1924 and into the spring of 1925 this became a regular journey for Davis, whose publishing companies benefited from appearing on many of the Ajax labels with titles written by then-popular black writers like Delaney.

In an undated letter from Davis's files, black showman Thomas "Baby" Grice (a member of Moton's Minstrels temporarily located in Franklin, Indiana, for an engagement) wrote to Davis offering words and music of a song he wanted Davis to have Helen Gross record. "This is one of Hellen faveright songs," he asserted. "Ps. let Hellen Gross make this on Record." The relationship with Davis seemed of some standing for Grice footnoted "Pleas send-contracts at once i will send them back at once, becaus i wont be here long."

Whatever else Grice accomplished in his career, he managed to convince some artists to record his compositions during the era when female vaudeville singers held favor among race record purchasers. In August 1924 Clarence Williams recorded—and published—two of Baby Grice's songs by Laura Smith for Okeh. Clara Smith (no relation to Laura) recorded Grice's composition "San Francisco Blues" two months later. That same month Virginia Liston waxed his "Monkey Jungle Blues." In January 1926 Ozie McPherson recorded "He's My Man, He's Your Man" (attributed to "Callans-Baby Grice"), while in September 1927 Butterbeans and Susie committed Grice's composition "Jelly Roll Queen" to wax.

The sheet music for Helen Gross's "I Wanna Jazz Some More" contained the opening bars to another song published by Joe Davis, "31st Street Blues," which Clara Smith—among many—had recorded earlier in the year. She had signed, in her own hand, a photograph of her at a young age, "To my pal Joe Davis from Clara Smith."

Many artists must have signed their photographs gratefully to managers, publishers, and the like. Many writers sent copy to music publishers they knew, hoping for recognition and acceptance. Singers and musicians must have had occasions when the A&R man helped out on disc, even if it was unusual that he also published the songs. These were exciting years for the nascent black recording world in New York City, what with black entrepreneurs like Clarence Williams, W. C. Handy, and Perry Bradford.

Joe Davis, however, was white.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# The Melody Man

*This page intentionally left blank*

## Chapter One

# "That's Got 'Em"

Joseph Morton Davis was born into precisely the right period of American history in precisely the right place to enable him to carve his later musical career. Decades before Barry Gordy's Motown stable of artists finally (and firmly) pushed black popular music comfortably into the mainstream, Davis can be viewed as a pioneer who unwittingly helped to break racial barriers in the music industry. His attitude toward his work helped to move the notion within the industry that "quality trumped race."

By the summer of 1924, when Joe Davis was handling the race talent for Ajax, he had been in the music business for nearly a decade. More than half a century of musical career lay ahead of Davis even then, and had he simply been involved in the Tin Pan Alley scene—as indeed he also was—his career would have been both interesting and instructive. Involved as he was throughout his career with equal ease among black and white entertainers, Davis's career pattern was less typical of the average New York manager/publisher. Involved in such depth at an early period, and at equal depth at later periods, effectively only with black artists, he stood out as an exception for the pre–World War II era. Only a handful of others, perhaps most notably Duke Ellington's somewhat controversial manager (sometimes characterized as his overseer), Irving Mills, fulfilled a similar role at this time.

Born in New York City on October 6, 1896, to middle-class parents, Joseph Davis's mother was of English descent; his father, Louis (possibly born in Germany) fit the stocky, stern, Prussian-mustached stereotype perfectly. Youngest of eleven children, none of them musical, he resisted moving into his father's soda water business on 121st and Pleasant Avenue, although he worked for him for a while. In prescribed fashion, Davis took piano lessons when he was about ten and soon became noted as a singer with natural talent. He played at church and basketball events and sang at theaters, like the Gotham, for "song sales" (sales of sheet music). He also



began writing his own lyrics and by 1913 tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to publish them.

His first part-time job at the age of sixteen was as an office boy in the Sheldon School where he earned \$7.00 a week. Here Davis learned efficiency and how to operate the multigraph machine, in which he saw a chance to further himself. He then obtained a job as a full-time multigraph operator printing the "Daily Menu" for the Childs Restaurants chain at their main office. He planned them so far in advance that he knew what people in Salt Lake City would be eating ten days before they did. A bright young man, Davis quickly grew bored with this job and began looking for a new, more interesting position. He soon landed a job at the Palmer School of Penmanship, where he learned the rudiments of law.

The various skills learned at all three jobs stood him in good stead in later operations. Some twenty years later Davis talked of attending business school, even though he never completed high school. The various jobs he held over the years, however, served as his "business school" and proved quite sufficient in preparing Davis for his music industry careers.

By 1914 Davis had his first song published: "Down Where the Old Road Turns," with lyrics and part of the music by him. Significantly, he soon borrowed \$50 from his father in order to buy back the rights to "Down Where the Old Road Turns." Early on, Joe Davis learned the lesson to "never sell a copyright" because he felt—quite rightly—that money could be made from owning the song rights.

Davis quickly became a song-plugger, a term applied to a piano player (or occasionally a singer) employed by music stores in the early twentieth century to promote and help sell new sheet music. Davis, for example, hyped his own songs in stores owned by the McCrory chain and worked most often at the store on nearby 149th Street at a time when sheet music was ten cents a copy. According to ASCAP, his second composition, "Syncopated Bride and Groom" (cowritten with Harold O'Hare), was published in 1915.

The following year Davis borrowed another \$50 from his father and rented "desk space" (in his own words) on West 45th Street, and from here he launched Cathedral Music Co. His logo featured a banner heading with the company name surmounted by a cathedral set in the clouds. The stationary indicated that Davis had hired Matty Friedburg as his general manager, and their phone number—Bryant 429—was proudly printed in all script using a distinctive gothic face. Davis now had a company and it looked to all the world as if it had been in business for years, with a sense of both heritage and respectability.

That same year he also set up Triangle Music Publishing Company with trombonist George F. Briegel. One song he cowrote that year with Briegel, "There's Many a Smiling Face That Covers an Aching Heart," underscored his willingness to collaborate. The reverse of the sheet music carried the first page of "Syncopated Bride and Groom" but a 1916 copyright date is shown.

The outbreak of war in 1917 found both Davis and Briegel in the navy, where Davis wrote "If You Can't Enlist, Buy a Victory Bond" in collaboration with J. Fred Coots. If nothing else, it shows Davis's quick eye for a potential seller; he later proved to be just as fast off the mark when World War II began. Briegel, as a chief petty officer, led and arranged for the Pelham Navy Band—a position with sufficient punch that he brought about an appointment for Davis as a French horn player in his band.

Fortunately, the war was of such short duration that it made no serious impact upon the new publishing company. Eager to return to work, Davis returned to New York City as soon as he could. Within a few months Davis scored once again with a topical tune, "I've Done My Bit for Uncle Sam" (1919).

The short war period had brought Davis into contact with the pioneer black bandleader and early jazzman Wilbur Sweatman. Famous for his "Down Home Rag," Sweatman was also one of the first jazz clarinetists to record. His playing on the 1916 "My Hawaiian Sunshine" recording on the Emerson label shows undoubted improvisation and—had it been in a setting other than that of the Emerson Symphony Orchestra—it would long ago have been pointed out as an early example of jazz.

The meeting between Davis and Sweatman must have been mutually agreeable because by 1919 Triangle had published Sweatman's "That's Got 'Em," which he recorded for Columbia in February. The following session produced "Slide, Kelly, Slide," with music by Geo. F. Briegel and words by "Slide" Kelly, also a Triangle tune. It's clear that Briegel was Davis's trombone-playing business partner, while "Slide" Kelly hid the author's true identity; it is the first of numerous noms de plume used by Davis.

Inside a 1920 printing of Triangle's sheet music to this tune was the exhortation, *Hear "SLIDE, KELLY, SLIDE" on Columbia record No. 2775, OkeH [sic] record No. 4103, Gennet [sic] record No. 9020*. This error and the sloppy prose suggest that the meticulous and increasingly busy Davis was no longer setting type for his own sheet music. Briegel also remained fully engaged in his own musical endeavors. He soon became bandmaster for the New York Fire Department, recording (possibly courtesy of Joe Davis) for Gennett in December 1922.

Despite this move into the new music of then-current bands and writers, Davis retained an enduring fondness for love songs and sentimental ballads, which stayed with him until his death. Nineteen hundred and seventeen saw, among others, the publication of "Won't You Sing an Old Time Love Song," while the 1919 sheet music to "That's Got 'Em" also plugged "Bring Back Your Love to Me" as "the prettiest ballad ever written." Davis was never one to understate a song's qualities.

He also took a page from Geo. F. Briegel's book by identifying himself as Jos. M. Davis. Once again it pointed a future direction in which he was constantly to change the name of his company, and frequently to reshuffle the layout of his own name. The "M" either remained as such or vanished; Morton didn't even appear as one of the pseudonyms, even when he seemed to be searching for new ones.

Davis's several-year association with Briegel almost certainly introduced Davis to influential figures in the music business, which proved to be his first firm step on the road to transient fame. Briegel, however, seemed more interested in performing and conducting than the publishing end of the business. In 1919 Davis finally broke out on his own, buying out Briegel's interest in Triangle Music.

He teamed up briefly with Frank Papa, writing and publishing "Lovesick Blues" and "Why Don't You Drive My Blues Away," as well as publishing F. Wheeler Wadsworth's "Just Say the Word," cowritten with his pianist, Victor Arden of the soon-to-be-famous Arden-Ohman Orchestra. Perhaps, in exchange, they recorded the second of the Davis-Papa tunes above for Pathe in 1919 as did Julia Gerity (a jazz-influenced vaudeville performer) in September of the same year.

Davis was also keeping a weather eye on the stage. The F. Wheeler Wadsworth Pathe title of the Davis-Papa tune opened "Save Your Money, John"—Bert Williams's then current big hit (with words and music by Les Copeland and Alex Rodgers) at the Ziegfeld Follies at the New Amsterdam Theatre. This show proved quite popular and ran for 171 performances. Davis kept an undated and uncredited press clipping that stated: "Joe Davis, business manager of [Triangle Music] is proudly exhibiting to all visitors the following telegram from Atlantic City, where the Follies of 1919 opened: 'Save Your Money, John big success in Ziegfeld's Follies. (Signed) Bert Williams.'"

J. Fred Coots—with whom Davis had written "If You Can't Enlist" in 1917 and who went on to write "Love Letters in the Sand" and, shades of Davis, "Goodbye Mama, I'm Off to Yokohama"—underscores the influence

of Davis's time as a song-plugger and his interest in topical songs. "Why Don't You Drive My Blues Away" and "Save Your Money, John" are two Triangle-published tunes among Wheeler's many Pathe recordings.

Another 1919 song was one of the many tunes titled "Sugar," this one written by a young man from New Orleans, Al Bernard. The following years saw a considerable number of Bernard or Bernard-coauthored tunes published by Triangle Music. Many of these songs were recorded together with Bernard's longtime musical partner, Ernest Hare.

This duo actually provided Davis his first involvement in recording when Bernard and Hare cut a test demo for Federal in New York City with Davis accompanying them on piano. Davis remembered the session as occurring "about 1919" but the label reportedly commenced operation in 1920. As with many of Davis's business colleagues and friends, they remained in close contact throughout their lives, and he was of great help to Bernard in his last, difficult years. During these early days, Bernard also became friendly with W. C. Handy because of his success with "St. Louis Blues," and it is quite probable that this facilitated links between Davis and Handy, who remained lifelong friends.

In 1920 the team of Davis and Frank Papa began writing for Pace & Handy Music, based in the Gaiety Theater Building at 1545 Broadway. Their first Pace & Handy composition, "Lovin' Blues," was published that year, but by January 1921, Harry Pace left to form his own company to issue Black Swan Records. Handy quickly reorganized his firm as Handy Brothers Music.

Davis persisted with Triangle Music and copyrighted many more songs by Al Bernard, in particular. Always looking to expand his business, Davis continued adding new and significant names to his roster of songwriters. Gus Haenschen wrote many selections, including the timely "President Harding March," while Davis collaborated with Frank Papa and Bartley Costello on "Look for Me in Tennessee." "Lone Star," written by Al Bernard and Rudy Wiedoeft, brought a number of tunes from this highly influential alto sax player into the Triangle Music fold. Another important contemporary composer, pianist J. Russel Robinson, initially appeared on the Triangle roster as a cowriter of "A Picture of Mother." Within three years of its establishment, Joe Davis had built Triangle Music into an ever-growing, increasingly visible business.

Although overshadowed by its newer, larger, and more commercially viable partner, Cathedral Music continued to do business. In November 1920 it purchased the rights to "Until We Part," in a fascinating contract.

The three owners were to receive "a royalty of One (1) Cent per copy for every regular copy of sheet music sold and paid for; also Sixteen and two-thirds percent (16  $\frac{2}{3}$ %) of all mechanical royalties received."

Writer/publisher mechanical royalties were split between the songwriters and the company that publishes their song. The record company pays these royalties to the publisher, who then pays the writer a share of the royalty in a split that is decided contractually. The split is often 50/50, but could be any agreed-upon percentage.

Recording artist mechanical royalty contracts can be very complex and have been contentious since the system initially developed early in the twentieth century. The concept is simple enough: the recording artists are paid royalties (currently somewhere between 8 percent and 25 percent) of the suggested retail price of the recording. The percentage depends upon the amount negotiated in the initial contract. Generally, the more popular artist receives a higher percentage. But, royalties can be affected by issues such as the distribution of promotional copies and the return of unsold stock.

The really interesting section of this contract stipulated that "Cathedral Music Co. further agrees to start advertising this number by January 1, 1921, and promises to make this THE [sic] number one fox-trot ballad feature in their advertising for at least five months and to work on no other fox-trot during that time; and also to issue at least five thousand dance orchestrations for the start to be distributed among the orchestra leaders throughout the country and further agrees to print up as many copies as may be needed." Davis really stepped out on a limb with this clause in the contract, but, then, he rarely stepped back from an interesting challenge.

### Triangle Takes Over

It seems quite possible that the exceptionally grandiose terms of this contract was the reason Cathedral Music vanished and Triangle took over. Music industry veterans Alex Sullivan, Justin Ring, and Fred W. Hager (both major A&R managers at OKeh) benefited from this largesse. In February 1920 Hager formed the orchestra that backed Mamie Smith on her first OKeh recording—"That Thing Called Love" and "You Can't Keep a Good Man Down"—the coupling that effectively gave rise to the entire race recording industry. Interestingly, Hager's name is given in the 1931 Triangle Music catalogue as Mile Rega.

The Cathedral Music contract for "Until We Part" included the enigmatic attribution "\$10,000 prize waltz song 'Midnight Moon,'" printed at the bottom of the page. The sheet music for "Until We Part" named the writers as T. Ernest Hare and Robert Shafer with a melody by Al Bernard. In later catalogues of Joe Davis Inc. (successor to Triangle Music), Sam Coslow, perhaps then a more successful songwriter, replaced Bernard's name. This alteration occurred prior to his partnership in the publishing firm of Spier & Coslow. Hare, along with Billy Jones, joined Davis in the song-plugging trade.

Apart from a toe-in-a-number-of-doors, and the addition of some well-known tunes into Triangle's catalogue, no obvious direction yet emerged for Davis's burgeoning music publishing business. Whether or not his links with black artists and entrepreneurs like Bert Williams, Wilbur Sweatman, and W. C. Handy influenced his future directions, by 1921 Davis was slowly moving in the direction of race recordings. As ever, he persisted by publishing ballads and became more involved in the recording process, which at least ensured that his songs received publicity on disc and piano roll as well as the then more important sheet music. He published "Dreaming Blues" in 1920 in collaboration with Edythe Baker, which was then recorded on an Aeolian piano roll.

Perhaps inspired by his connections with Wilbur Sweatman, by 1920 Davis became increasingly familiar with the newly formed jazz bands around New York City. Triangle Music published "California Blossom," composed by and featuring the Louisiana Five, which sported a hitherto unseen photograph of the band looking at the sheet music. Words were by Spencer Williams, who was to become a major part of the future Davis network. However, although the Louisiana Five recorded about all sorts of blossoms—"Orange Blossom" and even "Golden Rod" and "Weeping Willow"—"California Blossom" remained unrecorded by them.

In 1921 several more local and significant jazz names entered Triangle's catalogue. Pianist Jimmy Durante, whose Original New Orleans Jazz Band had made some fine sides for Okeh in 1919, chipped in with "I'm on My Way to New Orleans" and "Mean Daddy Blues." "Let's Agree to Disagree," partly written by Durante, opened up a new range of contacts for Davis. Although it is not the first time Davis had been involved with Durante's cowriters, Chris Smith and Mamie Smith (no relation), the Durante connection helped to cement these relationships.

Chris Smith, from Charleston, South Carolina, became an established songwriter, with pre-World War I hits to his credit like "Ballin' the Jack"

and "Down in Honky Tonk Town." His involvement with Davis lasted for years and even by the late 1930s he listed Smith's unpublished "Once in a While" from 1921 in his inventory. Davis had published Mamie Smith's "Weepin'" earlier in the year and recorded it at the end of August for Okeh. The session including "Let's Agree to Disagree"—recorded some six weeks later for the same company—remains significant because all three titles recorded on that date were Triangle Music publications. Subsequent sessions for a year featured more Triangle Music tunes.

The October 1921 session also introduced another South Carolina musician, trumpeter Bubber Miley, who appeared on many early to mid-1920s Davis sessions and later starred in Duke Ellington's orchestra. Recorded at the "Let's Agree" session was "Cubanita," published as sheet music with a picture of Mamie Smith and her 7 Jazz Hounds, and a heavily powdered Mamie Smith at that! A third title, "Ramblin' Blues," featured the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, with words by Al Bernard and music by DJ "Nick" La Rocca and Larry Shields.

Clarinetist Garvin Bushell, who played on many early race sessions, provides an interesting sidelight to this Mamie Smith session. After listening to "Let's Agree to Disagree," he denied his presence, stating, "I never had that fast vibrato," although he offered two interesting insights into similar sessions: "I hated dates like this because you had to read so much. You had no chance to put in anything of your own. I didn't want to read, because I figured I could play it better than they could write. . . . I don't think they'd hire Bubber Miley for a date like this where reading was involved; Bubber didn't have much chops then. Besides, that cornet is too stiff to be Bubber" (Mark Tucker, *Jazz from the Beginning* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989], 154).

Still at the center of action for Davis and Triangle Music, Mamie Smith's next session included "Carolina Blues," written by Dave Ringle, who wrote "Wabash Blues" (recorded at the subsequent session). The sheet music arrangement for "Carolina Blues" was by pianist Bob Ricketts, who, with pianist Mike Jackson, signed contracts in November 1921 with Davis for "Louisville Blues" on which they both received royalties of one cent per copy of sheet music sold and 12.5 percent of all mechanical royalties received, payable twice a year. At Mamie Smith's next session, she recorded Durante's "Mean Daddy Blues," which Davis also published.

Whatever the reasons, other than his clear desire to increase sales, Joe Davis became increasingly and strongly involved with black artists and their recording sessions. Throughout his career, however, Davis didn't



work solely with blues and jazz artists. He continued to work with the worlds of popular music and the emerging race record industry as well as to help lower the barriers that segregated black from white artists.

Al Bernard continued to sell well for him and "The Boy from Dixie" even wrote a "character coon song," "I Ain't Afraid of Nuthin' Dat's Alive," harkening back decades to the minstrel show. He even played with the ever-present myth of the black man's fear of ghosts, plus such stereotype lines as "I love to play with razors." Bert Williams actually recorded it for Columbia in July 1921 but it was not issued.

As it happens, Williams's last recorded song, made shortly before his death in March 1922, was a "character song," "Not Lately," and Triangle Music marketed it as "the last song featured and sung for Columbia Records by the late Bert Williams." Durante's "I'm on My Way to New Orleans" was featured by the blackface artist "Sugarfoot" Gaffney, performer with Neil O'Brien's Minstrels. "Thrills," according to the sheet music was—not to undersell the point—"a thrilling song . . . a thrilling foxtrot." Presumably it sold well enough to run through different editions with Rudy Wiedoeft's Cinderella (*sic*) Roof Orchestra on one printing and Finzel's Arcadia Orchestra of Detroit on another, possibly for regional distribution.

In 1921 Davis ventured into a new business when he formed a partnership with Rudy Wiedoeft making custom-made sax mouthpieces. One of their first customers—a twenty-year-old saxophonist named Herbert Vallee—became so enamored with Wiedoeft that he adopted his first name. As "Rudy" Vallee he quickly emerged as an American popular idol, a close friend of Davis all his life, and the man to break one of Davis's biggest hits, "S'posin'" (1929).

Typically, as this thread became more deeply woven into Davis's future career, the year ended with deeper involvement in black musical culture. Triangle Music published "You'll Want My Love, But Honey It Will Be All Gone," with words and music by Spencer Williams. The swiftly rising record star Lucille Hegamin recorded it for Arto in the spring of 1921 shortly after she "successfully introduced" the sheet music.

A May 1, 1921, contract obligating Triangle Music to pay blues singer Daisy Martin a very generous 25 percent of all mechanical royalties received from the General Phonograph Corporation (Okeh Records) on "all numbers that are personally recorded by the said Daisy Martin" suggests a rather more intriguing direction for Davis. Daisy Martin had recorded one of Triangle Music's major early hits of 1921, "Spread Yo' Stuff," for the Starr Piano Company of Richmond, Indiana, on their Gennett label. Davis



possibly had a hand in this (Martin's first) session, despite the other title being written by Clarence Williams.

Her first Okeh session following Davis's May 1921 contract commenced with a Triangle Music publication, the Davis-Papa song "Won't Someone Help Me Find My Lovin' Man." The precise date of this session remains unclear, but it is almost certainly the first session under Davis's direct control. He ultimately produced many more for a wide range of companies over the next five decades.

Probably because Davis simply saw a business opportunity, he moved in to fill the void. From our twenty-first-century perspective (when the integration of the recording industry is a settled fact), it almost seems inevitable that this innovative entrepreneur should become more involved in the African American music scene in New York in the early 1920s. But Davis's music business ventures—especially at his busiest between 1923 and 1925—were not mainstream business practices at the time.

He had a way—an easy manner bolstered by his respect for talent—with black artists and Len Kunstadt of *Record Research* recalled people telling him that Davis constantly hawked his artists around to record companies in the 1920s. It is easy to suggest cynically that he was only selling songs. After all there must have been many easier ways to promote songs by black artists, who were inundated by an army of white publisher-promoters. But there weren't. There was only Joe Davis.

### Sentimental Songs

Just the same, Joe Davis remained a soft touch for a sentimental song and always had an eager eye open for a gimmick. The year 1923 began with one of these, in the unlikely shape of a bright-eyed ten-year-old girl, Betty Gulick, billed by Davis as the "youngest songwriter." Photographs show a cheerful little girl signing the Triangle Music contract with the sheet music of *My Mother's Lullaby* on the piano. An ever-dapper Davis stands beside her on one photograph actually caught in natural pose as he watches her sign the contract. Typically, as in another shot from this photo session, he poses for the camera, bright eyes fixed on the lens. By now Davis had sufficient experience of really plugging a song, which must have been made easier by Miss Gulick, who had made her stage debut at the age of six in Eddie Carroll's comedy drama, *Daddy Dumplings*.

By late January she was signing sheet music copies in stores, and clearly enjoying the experience, with Davis watching from the wings. About that time Davis clipped write-ups of the story in newspapers from Atlanta to New Brunswick while the *Chicago Record* (January 19, 1923) proclaimed that: "Davies [*sic*] set a record, when, ten days after accepting 'My Mother's Lullaby' he had the copies on sale at practically all the leading music shops." This quote affords a very real insight into his marketing ability, confirmed by the fact that he sent a bound copy from "America's Youngest Song Writer," to Mrs. Warren G. Harding, wife of the president.

A further measure of the girl's fame is afforded by the post office. A letter from Denmark addressed to her as:

Miss Betty Gullick  
The little 10 years composer of  
Mama's Cradle-song  
U.S.A.  
America

had penciled on it, "try 2537 East 6th St, B'kln." Davis kept a photograph of the envelope, proof it did arrive safely.

Ever anxious now to boost his race catalogue, he bought up material from Dixie Music in Memphis, written by white bandleader and songwriter Bob Miller. A folio had been published by Dixie Music of *The Famous Beale Street Africa Opera Series* played by Bob Miller and his Syncopaters. This included "Mean Eyes," which was recorded that summer by Warners' Seven Aces in Atlanta for Okeh, and "Strut Your Material," which Mamie Smith had made for the same company in 1922. Bob Miller's Steamer Idlewild Orchestra was hardly a hot one but the songs were the important thing, not the ensemble.

An increasing number of pianists entered Triangle Music's catalogue. J. Lawrence Cook wrote "My Lovin' Mamie," which was "successfully featured by Mamie Smith," according to the sheet music. Neither this, nor the "successfully featured" "Sunday School Blues" by Lemuel Fowler (words by Dave Ringle again) was actually recorded by Mamie Smith, whose 1923 sessions were less plentiful and yielded fewer records than those of 1922. Lizzie Miles, who had recorded Triangle Music's Bob Miller-written "Tri-flin' Man" in 1923 for Columbia, was promoted on the front of the sheet music to J. Lawrence Cook's "Whicker Bill Blues," which advertised on

the reverse with complete inconsequence, "Carolita" (a Spanish foxtrot), "Hawaiian Nightingale" (waltz), "Only Just Suppose," and an old 1918 ballad cowritten with George Briegel. Lizzie Miles's "She Walked Right Up and Took My Man Away," coauthored by Spencer Williams, was actually recorded in June 1923 for Brunswick, but unissued.

These early years when Triangle Music expanded must have been exciting times for the hard-working and innovative Davis, who had as yet no particular path to beat. Davis lived in the epicenter of the song-publishing world and just down the street from the Harlem Renaissance. Music of all types surrounded him in the early 1920s and he didn't have to look hard to find new business opportunities.

Nineteen hundred and twenty-two brought further published songs from stalwarts like Al Bernard and Rudy Wiedoeft, who wrote another tune named "Carolina Blues" with Gus Haenschen. At first glance it is simply another version of "Carolina Blues," actually Ringle's rights were bought out and the more marketable names of Wiedoeft and Haenschen were placed as writers on the original version. Davis added another pseudonym on the ballad "Smiles and Kisses," written with Bartley Costello, while new talent continued to come in.

Vaughn De Leath offered "New Orleans," which instantly went into Mamie Smith's recorded repertoire for Okeh, while Davis quickly published another pianist's first song. Ferdie Grofe's "Suez" became one of the first songs to receive the full Davis song-plugging treatment, attested to by photographs of superb store window displays. Grofe's fame moved on to eclipse his tune, but years later, Davis could look back with evident satisfaction at being the first publisher of many significant pianists. More than fifty years later, Davis told Dutch researcher Ate van Delden that "Suez" afforded his breakthrough with a major record company. Within several months—following recordings by Louis Katzman, Mike Markel, Rudy Wiedoeft, among others—Clyde Doerr waxed a very nice version of it for Victor in August 1922.

"Only Just Suppose," written by Harry Harris and Joe Solman, also received massive publicity, often through such store displays as S.S. Kresge's. The sheet music highlighted yet another popular Detroit band, Art Black's Pier Ballroom Orchestra. Another piece of Triangle sheet music also carried a picture of Art Black's orchestra, while plugging "Suez" on the reverse.

"Husk" O'Hare—a well-known white bandleader and promoter based in Chicago—was cowriter of the music of "Growin' Old Blues" published

by Triangle in 1922. The band bearing Hare's name had recorded four sessions for Gennett Records that year with his "Super Orchestra of Chicago." Husk (almost certainly not his given name) makes one wonder if he might be the Harold O'Hare with whom Davis had written one of his first-published tunes seven years earlier.

"Louisville Blues" also rose to some prominence again in 1922, being featured by the Al Sanders Orchestra from the Seelbach Hotel, Louisville, Kentucky (a shrewd piece of song-plugging on Davis's part), which inspired Davis to buy out Bob Ricketts's interest as writer for \$50.00 in March 1922. In later years, music publishers received considerable criticism for their outright purchase of song titles. Frank Driggs, in an article about pianist J. C. Johnson, stated that "publishers like Joe Davis . . . bought the tunes outright and there was no possible way for J.C. or his compatriots to seek redress for that type of rip-off" (Frank Driggs, "J. C. Johnson," *Whisky, Women, and . . .*, June 1983, 11).

Of course, no obligation existed on the part of the writer to sell their share of these rights. Likewise nothing guaranteed that enough consumers would step forward to ensure that the song made a profit. Mike Jackson had been collecting royalties on "Louisville Blues" for eighteen months before he decided to sell his remaining rights outright for \$25.00. Hind-sight is all very well but many a musician settled for the bird in the hand; and Davis had the bird.

An interesting contract exists for the day after Ricketts's sale of his interest in "Louisville Blues." Davis agreed to pay Sam Lanin 10 percent of all mechanical royalties from the tune plus a further 5 percent, "where the number is actually recorded for talking machine records by him, or any orchestra under his direction." Whatever the reason for Davis letting go of 10 percent—and it must have been a strong one—it certainly seems as if Lanin took no opportunity in seizing an extra 5 percent. If he ever received royalties for such recordings remains unknown, but the title does not seem to have been recorded under his name.

### New York City Blues Sessions

Nineteen hundred and twenty-three also found one of the best New York blues session cornet players writing for Davis. James "Bubber" Miley, later known for his work with Duke Ellington, at this stage performed on many blues recording sessions and told his biographer, Roger Pryor Dodge,

that he used to keep a little reed organ on which he used to play "while humming blues" (Roger Pryor Dodge, *Hot Jazz and Jazz Dance* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 51). The earliest written selection—"Those Blues"—published by Joe Davis and several subsequent tunes were credited to James W. Miley. "Those Blues," recorded on August 7, 1923, by Thomas Morris's Past Jazz Masters, featured Miley sharing the cornet lead with Morris and was assigned to Triangle in October. Miley, living then at 239 West 62nd Street, New York City, had passed on correspondence from Fred Hager at OKeh to Davis, whereby they offered a standard rate of one cent per record sold, of 90 percent of sales.

One tune, "I Ain't Been a Preacher All My Life" (to be performed at "Tempo Di-Preacher"), remains unpublished. Two selections, "Just for You" and "Will You Forgive Me," were taken over by Joseph M. Davis, Inc., one of the many shifts of ownership and company name that occurred during his career.

It is not clear what the purpose of the company name and ownership change was on most occasions, because Triangle continued to publish into 1924 and far beyond. In the last weeks of 1923 Davis added a Fletcher Henderson tune, "San Francisco Blues," although he published another version in 1924 by Baby Grice and one from veteran actor and writer Sidney Easton from Savannah.

One way or another and in a wide variety of contexts, contacts made in these early years stayed with Davis throughout his career. These people have a habit of popping up in the least expected places. Just as he became more involved during the early 1920s with race artists and recordings, matters came to a head in the autumn of 1923.

In his remarkable, detailed documentation of the life and times of Fletcher Henderson, Walter C. Allen stated that "In September 1923 Joe Davis, head of Triangle Music, announced their serious entry into the 'blues' business, signing four new 'blues' singers: Josie Miles, Ludie Wells, Gladys Jordan, and Ruth Coleman. . . . Josie Miles is well known to collectors; I presume Ludie Wells is the same person as Tудie Wells on Pathe; and Ruth Coleman made two sides for Pathe . . . but I've never heard of Gladys Jordan" (Walter C. Allen, *Hendersonia: The Music of Fletcher Henderson and His Musicians* [Highland Park, NJ: Walter C. Allen, 1973], 63).

Davis clearly wasted no time in publicizing his new major artist—Josie Miles—and swiftly brought his singers into recording studios. The *New York Amsterdam News* of September 1923 carried a subheading that:

## South Carolina Girl Gets Exclusive Recording Contract

Miss Josie Miles, who hails from Somerville, S.C., was signed up by the Starr Piano Co., of Richmond, Ind., as an exclusive singer of "Blues" for the "Gennett" records. All of which means a great deal when you know that prior to a week ago Miss Miles had never warbled her melodious voice into a recording horn and is the first Race artist to be signed up to sing exclusively for that company.

On the recommendation of Jos. M. Davis, under whose direction she is now working, Miss Miles made a test for Gennett and was immediately offered a tempting contract calling for forty "Blues" numbers during the coming twelve months. Two days following the signing of the contract Miss Miles made "Baby's Got The Blues" and "Kansas City Man Blues," which will be released shortly.

Although Miss Miles never had any recording experience, she isn't an utter stranger to the public, as she was quite a favorite with the "Shuffle Along" company, which enjoyed long and prosperous runs in New York and other big cities. Veteran phonograph men who have had the pleasure of hearing Miss Miles' maiden records predict she is a real find and that she will be a sensation within a few months.

This piece has all the hallmarks of having been written by Davis himself, possibly one of the "veteran" phonograph men, except that he would have been well aware that she had recorded many sides for Harry Pace's Black Swan label in 1922, of which ten were released. Pace had run into difficulties with his label early in 1923 and, as Brian Rust relates, "business had apparently fallen off to such an extent that no records were announced to the trade after July 1923" (Brian Rust, *The American Label Book* [New York: Da Capo Press, 1984, 36]. For more information about Black Swan, please consult Helge Thygesen, Mark Berresford, and Russ Shor, *Black Swan: The Record Label of the Harlem Renaissance* [Nottingham, England: VJM Publications, 1996]).

That Josie Miles's future with Black Swan ends just in time for her to sign with Joe Davis is clearly no coincidence. Davis knew Harry Pace, who had published his "Lovin' Blues," cowritten with Frank Papa, in 1921. Pace and Handy's publishing office had been in the next block on Broadway and pianist Arthur Ray, one of the important session men at the Ajax recordings for Davis, had been director of the Black Swan Jazz Masters, who backed Josie Miles on many of her theater tours.

Whatever Davis's reason for keeping Josie Miles's previous recording career a secret, he quickly set about ensuring maximum coverage at Gennett. She recorded her first coupling on September 15, 1923, followed by three more sessions before the end of the year. Ruth Coleman had recorded even earlier, on September 10 for Pathe, somewhat improbably with "Hutch" as the accompanying pianist. Early in October, again at Pathe, Tудie Wells cut two titles, one of which was a cover of Josie Miles's "Baby's Got the Blues" for Gennett. This time the pianist accompanying her was Fletcher Henderson.

The fourth artist whom Triangle had signed up in September (reported as Gladys Jordan by Walt Allen) might well have been Genevieve Jordan, who recorded a test for Edison in late September. The magazine cited by Allen had misnamed also Tудie Wells and from its publication date, it would seem that this was Davis's fourth artist, logically testing out at yet another record company. However, Edison's view of Genevieve Jordan's rendition of "Gulf Coast Blues" was "Can't understand a word—poor voice."

As often occurred, such comments told us more about the biased views, tastes, and ignorance of the music by Edison staff than they did about the artists auditioning. Nevertheless, Miss Jordan did return (October 11, 1922) to produce a test recording, which remains unissued. As confirmation that she was the missing Joe Davis artist, the title was "Baby's Got the Blues" with Sam Wooding as the cowriter.

Thus, by the autumn of 1923, Joe Davis had established himself firmly at all the major record companies issuing race records. He ran the Ajax operation and was responsible for many Pathe sessions. He booked Josie Miles exclusively with Gennett and had recorded a dozen titles from her at their studios by February 1924. At the last session he recorded "31st Street Blues," which Fletcher Henderson had previously recorded for Pathe in November 1923. Shortly thereafter Clara Smith (with a Henderson unit) recorded it on the last day of January 1924. Josie Miles featured "31st Street Blues" in the influential show "Runnin' Wild." *The Phonograph & Talking Machine Weekly* of January 30, 1924, stated that "when A. J. Piron and his New Orleans Orchestra, Sam Wooding's Society Syncopators, LeRoy Smith and his Orchestra, Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra, and William H. Dover Tempo Orchestra, start featuring it within six days after its release it must be a sensation."

Just how early Davis was involved with Edison is not clear, but by September 1923 he was involved with recording Helen Baxter (as Ellen Coleman). Her "She Walked Right Up and Took My Man Away" is mentioned

in the Edison files as "another Blues song sung by Ellen Coleman only this time we accompanied [*sic*] her with our own orchestra instead of the colored orchestra. The Triangle Co. reports a growing interest in the song."

It was a tune part-written by Spencer Williams and published the previous year. The "colored orchestra" that had accompanied her in July was that of Lemuel Fowler, and might have included clarinetist Bob Fuller. On the same day, June 26, that Helen Baxter's two titles were "passed" by Edison to be recorded, Lem Fowler recorded "Wicked Dirty Fives" as a piano solo, which he'd attempted to record behind Helen for Columbia in May. The Edison file comment on his solo, which would surely have been fascinating as one of the first recorded versions of "The Fives" was "Here's what the coons say is the REAL stuff. Do you think we could sell it?"

This comment underscores the problem that faced many record company executives over the years; they didn't understand the music, but could they sell it? They were, after all, a commercially viable business largely dedicated to selling phonograph records. We must be thankful that so many times they thought they could, and issued material, when with hindsight we know they didn't have a chance. Perhaps, as far as Edison was concerned, the Baxter-Coleman contact over "She Walked Right Up and Took My Man Away" was purely concerned with Triangle's publication of the song and that Davis's first serious contact with Josie Miles's occurred with her initial appearance there on April 21, 1924. For whatever reasons, these contacts plunged Joe Davis deeper into business with both Ajax and Edison.

### Ajax and Edison

As Joe Davis entered 1924 he became increasingly immersed in race recordings. He claimed that his first real break came when Brunswick began issuing black artists on their Vocalion series in 1923. Davis proudly stated that he placed vaudeville singer Rosa Henderson with them and her husband—Slim Henderson—on Columbia's 14000 race series, although his recordings are often viewed as more popular songs and comedic routines rather than blues.

Throughout the year, Davis-published tunes appeared on Clarence Williams's sessions with Virginia Liston and Sara Martin. Liston recorded Thomas "Baby" Grice's "San Francisco Blues" in April 1924 while Laura Smith recorded two Grice-written tunes (both published by Williams) in August. Perhaps it says something for the perception of both Davis and



Williams that they persisted with a songwriter who often displayed a limited ability to spell. Grice's unpublished "Want My Man All the Time," presumably dating from about 1924, read in his own hand:

I am fealing blue ofley bad  
about my man about my man  
Ant had no loving sence he ben gone  
loving is the thing [I] nead

Just the same, Grice suggested that Davis have Helen Gross record the number, though it appears that he disagreed with this suggestion.

Apart from one unissued title for Edison, the recordings were all made for the Ajax label, owned by the Compo Company, trading out of Lachine, Canada, a southwestern suburb of Montreal. Once Ajax had set up its state-of-the-art acoustic New York recording studio, at 240 West 55th Street, Joe Davis quickly gained the responsibility for scouting its race talent and was clearly given fairly free reign as the A&R man. Davis strongly impressed upon his artists the importance of clear diction during the "horn" recording days.

Ajax veteran bandleader and banjo player Elmer Snowden recalled those early days:

I didn't start making records until 1924, and then I was recording for all the singers . . . all the blues singers practically in New York . . . There was a man who came in from Canada and the name of the record was Ajax, and he came in and we started recording for him and we'd finish maybe Monday morning, 'cause we'd stay in the studio overnight . . . sleep there . . . he'd go out and get our food, and we'd be there continuous 'cause it was a one day recording . . . you got that tinny sound. Those big horns, they looked like big megaphones that you're playing into . . . they would stick them through a black curtain, and they'd all be hooked into something in the back. And they'd have this big thick piece of wax . . . about three inches thick. Now as the table would turn they would record on it. Now if it was no good, then they'd scrape that off—that was a test record. Now when they got to the one that was good, that would be the master, you wouldn't hear that, but the test, they'd let you hear that so you could hear what mistakes you made, but when they got to the master . . . they'd say, "Put it

in sawdust." And when they put it in sawdust, that's the end of that and next time you'd hear it would be out on the street. (Elmer Snowden, notes to the long-playing record, "Elmer Snowden" IAJRC 12)

Those masters, safely stored in sawdust, were rushed overnight by train to Lachine for processing.

The pianist on most of these sessions—Louis Hooper, a black Canadian—was a trained musician, a graduate of the Detroit Conservatory of Music. He moved to New York City in 1921 to teach music at the Martin-Smith School on 37th Street in Harlem. Some forty-five years later he vividly recalled the circumstances in which he met Joe Davis:

Josie Miles telephoned the Martin Smith School . . . where I was teaching . . . said a music publisher needed a piano player . . . I won't say a pianist, I'll say a piano player . . . to do some recording. Making records was the furthest thing from my mind but I went down to the Broadway Central Building where Joe had his office. I met him, a congenial man . . . it went from there . . . I was very nervous and the studio was cold . . . I don't think they had any heat in the place! (Jim Kidd, "Louis Hooper," *Record Research* 77 [June 1966]: 3)

Along with Elmer Snowden and clarinetist, Bob Fuller, Hooper constituted the regular studio band for Davis. As he said, "We were his [Davis's] three" (Ibid.). According to Hooper (Snowden's "man from Canada") none other than Herbert Samuel Berliner, son of the recording industry pioneer Emile Berliner, was present at all the Ajax sessions. Hooper added more color to his description of the early days in Ajax's New York City studio:

Ajax was home . . . we made them all in the same studio. Mr. Berliner was always present for them. We had a monthly appearance there without fail . . . sometimes we made a dozen records a month. Joe was worried sometimes that we wouldn't reach our quota . . . Berliner really must have been turning them out. Most of the sessions were in the afternoon or early evening. I don't remember buying the copies that I have . . . I think they were shipped to the office . . . I do know that most of them were shipped to the southern states . . . We would make as a rule three test records and then they would say which was the master . . . We used to get \$7.50 a side. (Ibid., 4)

Elmer Snowden, more than forty years later, wrote to Davis informing him that his band from the Nest Club backed Mamie Smith on her Ajax coupling of "Lost Opportunity Blues" and "Good Time Ball" from about September 1924. Davis emphatically denied her appearance on Ajax was his work. Nonetheless, the top-notch Nest Club band featured Snowden and one other "regular" Ajax session man, trombonist Jake Frazier, along with Leslie Hutchinson (later, better known as "Hutch") on piano, bass-sax man Alex Jackson, and the Jenkins Orphanage alumni trumpeter Gus Aiken.

Davis spent some six to eight months with Ajax, and recorded several artists—most notably Rosa Henderson, Monette Moore, Josie Miles, Hazel Meyers, Fletcher Henderson—with whom he already maintained close business contacts. These nascent blues and jazz sessions all but died out by early 1925, presumably when Davis left, although links remained for him for many years with the Compo Company. His initial involvement with this Canadian company probably helped his own music publishing business, for he frequently sought Canadian copyrights in later years, perhaps to facilitate coverage in the United Kingdom. By mid-1925, Campo discontinued the Ajax label, presumably disappointed by poor record sales. Its demise can hardly have affected Davis much, as by that time his irons were in many musical fires.

January 1924 opened with a newspaper write-up of "Joseph M. Davis, director of the tour of Josie Miles, who has recorded on the Gennett . . . says she is climbing the ladder of fame with 'He's Never Gonna Throw Me Down,' her latest record." Recorded in October 1923, Josie Miles had been back to the Gennett studios several times by the time of the plug for her most recently released disc. He was beginning to buy up promising songs from other publishers. Tom Delaney had published "Sinful Blues" in 1923 through Down South Publishing, but by 1924 it joined a steadily growing number of other songs at Joe Davis Music, Inc., located at 1658 Broadway. That same year he operated Premier Songs from that address, though he had himself moved some eleven miles north to 2733 Morris Avenue in the Bronx, New York.

While involving himself wholeheartedly with Ajax, Davis also pushed the same artists for Pathe/Perfect, recording at their studios at 150 East 53rd Street. He also began promoting straight-ahead jazz performances by his musicians. His usual recording trio of Bob Fuller, Louis Hooper, and Elmer Snowden was most often augmented by Bub Miley on cornet and Jake Frazier on trombone.

Davis long maintained that Miley's usual nickname was "Bub" rather than "Bubber" as is known to the jazz world. Titles written later in 1924 were credited, in fact, to Bub Miley. Davis later pointed to his 1924 publishing of "Sweet Man Joe," a blues song, by Bub Miley and a number of self-written lead sheets by Miley of unpublished tunes, on which he signs himself as "Bub," as proof.

Evidence of a direct link between Ajax and Pathe comes from a five-piece band, the Kansas City Five. An October 1924 session appeared on both Pathe and Perfect. About a month later an Ajax session included a song common to both: Mike Jackson and Bob Ricketts's "Louisville Blues." The spring of 1925 saw an Ajax coupling (credited to the Kansas City Four) released also on Pathe and Perfect. Later in Pathe's recording life in the 1920s, the Canadian Compo Company recorded other material in their own studio expressly for Pathe. This link between the two separate companies might well have been Davis.

By the spring of 1924 Davis had brought Josie Miles to the attention of Edison, though the impact her demo of "Kansas City Man Blues" from her initial Gennett session seems to have been minimal; "awful voice," was the only opinion noted down by Edison officials. Undaunted, Davis persisted. Miles returned early in August, as a "mezzo contralto," this time trying out "Papa Will Be Gone," which earned the comment "she has a pretty good voice can use her." On September 15 she made three takes of Bub Miley's "Sweet Man Joe," for which she received \$25.00 and Miley and pianist Arthur Ray earned \$10.00 a piece. All three takes have survived but none were issued and she returned once more on October 2 to remake "Sweet Man Joe" and record another tune, this time backed by Davis's Kansas City Five. It is noteworthy that Miles received \$50.00 and Davis \$75.00.

But before Josie Miles had remade "Sweet Man Joe," Davis brought another vaudeville-style singer, Ethel Finnie, to Edison in July. "Try one," was the cryptic comment from Edison but the company never released "Mistreatin' Daddy Blues." Ethel Finnie had first recorded the previous November at an Ajax session, backed by her pianist husband, Porter Grainger, and enjoyed releases both on Ajax and another small New York City-based label, Emerson, in mid-1924. Shortly thereafter Finnie earned the unique honor of being the only African American blues singer to appear on an Edison Amberol cylinder, once again accompanied by her husband, singing "You're Gonna Wake Up Some Mornin' But Your Papa Will Be Gone." This must have posed severe artistic problems to the production

team because the title is etched into the end of the blue Amberol cylinder. This 1924 release never appeared on disc.

Charlie Matson's orchestra also recorded for Edison in July 1923. Matson, the first pianist Davis had used with some regularity on sessions, can be heard playing with a pick-up band (along with Coleman Hawkins) on Mamie Smith's May 1922 session, which started and ended with Joe Davis tunes, "Mean Daddy Blues" and "New Orleans." By 1924 Matson expanded his musical business interests as the manager of a booking agency, with the "exclusive" Columbia artist Maggie Jones among his clients.

Ten days before Josie Miles successfully made "Sweet Man Joe," a white contralto (Marjorie Royce) had made test auditions for Edison, most notably Tom Delaney's "I Wanna Jazz," which Helen Gross had just cut at a Davis-run Ajax session. "Pretty fair. Articulation good as I hear most of the words. Both tunes seem OK" was Edison's verdict. Davis always stressed diction and perhaps Marjorie Royce was guided to Edison by Davis.

Early in October 1924 Viola McCoy tested out at Edison with the report, "Think she is good—is loud I hear many words. Miss A. says hears all." That month she had other sessions set up by Davis, recording two of his titles for Vocalion backed possibly by Bub Miley and Arthur Ray, and two titles with Davis's Choo Choo Jazzers for Ajax. During this month, Davis brought two more of his established artists, Rosa Henderson and Helen Gross, to Edison.

Rosa Henderson had survived an Edison audition earlier in October, with a comment that she had "a much better voice than those on Okeh, Vocalion or Columbia." On October 28 she returned along with Davis, Helen Gross, and the backing band, the Kansas City Five. Rosa was first in the studio with "Don't Advertise Your Man," for which she received \$50.00, followed immediately by Helen Gross, whose "Undertaker's Blues" remains unreleased, although the test still exists. For this she received \$25.00 while Davis received \$100.00, written as two separate checks—one for \$75.00 and the other for \$25.00. Perhaps one was for Davis and the other for the band, which he intended to countersign.

Helen Gross passed a trial on October 16 (on the same date as Rosa Henderson), receiving an even better comment, "This woman has a voice very much like Henderson and is probably better. Think she will make good blues." Rosa Henderson returned at the next major Davis—led Edison session on November 21, 1924, when she covered the rejected Gross version. This time Edison released Henderson's version.

Almost exactly fifty-two years (on October 15, 1976) after Helen Gross and Rosa Henderson initially auditioned for Edison, Joe Davis presented a program about artists involved with Edison recordings at the Sixth Edison National Historical Site Annual in West Orange, New Jersey, at which he detailed his Edison adventures in securing talent for the label. On the day that Rosa Henderson recorded "Undertaker's Blues" at Edison, Davis had also brought along Josie Miles, who recorded "Mad Mama's Blues," for which she received \$25.00. This was to be her last session for Edison, while Viola McCoy both debuted and bowed out on the same day. Viola McCoy recorded first, cutting "Memphis Bound," which Rosa Henderson had recorded for Ajax and Pathe the previous month. Oddly an Edison note comments, "Rejected, but approved for Viola McCoy over telephone," which suggests that Davis may have had a few words on the matter.

An unknown kazoo was featured on "Memphis Bound," which *Blues and Gospel Records 1890-1943* (John Godrich, Robert M. W. Dixon, and Howard Rye [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997]) suggests might have been played by McCoy herself. Unless evidence exists regarding her enthusiastic kazoo playing, the likelihood is that this was played by Joe Davis, who produced many assorted sound effects on Ajax sessions. Perhaps this was why it was finally issued, despite its original rejection, but a report in *The Billboard* for December 27, 1924, offers another suggestion, assuming it is not too fanciful, "Viola McCoy, record singer, it said, has been ill at her home [442 W. 131st Street, New York] for several weeks." Could Joe Davis have called Edison to report this and ask them to release the title?

On behalf of the band, Davis received \$137.50. This session almost marks the end of his involvement with Edison, though Joe Davis was also paid \$25.00 as a vocalist on the Ernie Golden session of September 26, 1927. At first sight it seems improbable that the pop singer on this sweet band session was Davis, but the matrix number of the unissued title was 11914. This was "I Ain't Got Nobody," one of Davis's best-selling titles, which belies the suggestion that it might be mere coincidence.

One other possible Davis connection with Edison occurred in October 1924 with a session by Wilbur Sweatman, Davis's old business colleague. A note at Edison states of Sweatman's band, "I understand he was quite a hit with Columbia at one time." Perhaps Davis passed on the information both to Edison and to *The Billboard*, which carried a note in its November 15 issue that Sweatman had recorded "'Battleship Kate,' with a ten-piece band."

During 1924 Davis recorded many of his female singers with his usual musical backing groups at the Plaza Music Company's studios at 18 West 20th Street, New York, New York. These sessions emerged on a number of labels, notably Banner, Domino, Oriole, and Regal, but some Plaza material also appeared on Canadian labels like Apex, Starr, and Microphone. The usual trio was employed but pianists Cliff Jackson and Arthur Ray were occasionally used. Rex Stewart appeared on more sessions than Bub Miley and, according to Davis, Louis Metcalfe also took part. Sessions were coming thick and fast and one can see why in 1924, Davis was more involved with recording than he was with publishing, although they soon evened out and publishing had taken over by the late 1920s.

The provocatively named Texas Blues Destroyers provide perhaps the best example of Davis using the same group to record one of his songs for more than one company. This large-sounding aggregation actually consisted of Miley, a native of South Carolina, on cornet and Arthur Ray on reed organ, neither of whom had known ties to the Lone Star State. Interestingly, the distinctive sounding reed organ was one of Miley's favorite instruments; he owned one himself and enjoyed playing blues on it.

This duo recorded "Lenox Avenue Shuffle" within a month or so in 1924 for Pathe, then Ajax, and finally Vocalion. The sheet music claims on the front page:

Featured and Played by  
TEXAS BLUES DESTROYERS  
on  
AEOLIAN—VOCALION  
AJAX  
BRUNSWICK  
PERFECT  
PATHE  
and PARAMOUNT RECORDS

This record turns up most often on Ajax, Pathe, and Perfect, but, quite curiously, seemingly never on either Brunswick or Paramount. It also underscores Davis's somewhat fleeting involvement with Paramount. Typical of Davis, all his irons were not in a single fire.

Around the same time he published "Mad Mama's Blues" by "Duke" Jones, which masked the identity of Spencer Williams, who was never averse to a pseudonym himself. Eventually, Williams ended up with over

two dozen and assorted jazz, blues, and personality noms de plume including Joe Smith, Bill Harris, L. Hardin, and Allan Burns. The year 1924 also saw the publication of "Down Hawaii Way," written by Heagney and Roxanne Hampton. The latter was Davis.

"Down Hawaii Way" underscores the importance of Davis's Hawaiian coverage. Like so many others, he cashed in on the surprisingly strong fad for Hawaiian music, which began about a decade before. Davis published many Hawaiian songs and, later, an entire folio of them. "Hawaiian Memories" of 1923 grew into "Hawaiian Song of Love" and "Hawaiian Sweetheart of Mine" by 1925. Covering every angle, he published "Hawaiian Mother of Mine" in 1927, credited remarkably to Davis-Hampton, both of whom being Davis.

Assorted tributes to Waikiki and Honolulu inevitably flowed from the pens of songwriters; Porter Grainger even wrote "Honolulu Sweetheart of Mine" in 1932. Davis—perhaps wisely—did not publish it. He already had, after all, "Hawaiian Sweetheart" and "Hawaiian Mother." In 1926 he published "In Hawaii by the Sea," although it must be difficult to be far from the sea anywhere in Hawaii, and John Palalaiki wrote "Sunny Smile of Hawaii," for an anthropomorphic approach. Palalaiki, like Hampton, was Davis in disguise.

In 1924 Davis continued to publish a variety of songs written by his old friend and prolific writer and recording artist Carson Robison, although "De Clouds Am Gwine Roll Away" only hints at its true camp-meeting flavor. Nonetheless, Davis himself was not above writing ostensibly black material and, as "Rev. Jackson," wrote a number of "jubilee" songs celebrating freedom. Tom Delaney wrote a song—"All the Girls Like Big Dick"—which, in 1924, understandably remained unpublished. Other similar songs, many of them dating from the late 1920s or early 1930s, would cause Davis enough trouble in the 1950s.

Davis, who by the mid-1940s became heavily involved in Caribbean music (albeit mostly Hispanic), also published a "West Indian novelty song" in 1924 cowritten by the Trinidadian entertainer and musical entrepreneur Sam Manning. "Calalu Blues" was probably the first, but assuredly not the last, contact between Davis and the intriguing and influential black West Indian whose fascinating career is slowly coming to light. A Trinidadian who recorded for Paramount in 1924, he had an active career on Broadway and Drury Lane. Manning served on the executive committee of International African Friends of Abyssinia (an early Pan-African movement), which had as treasurer Marcus Garvey's first wife, Amy Ashwood,



and as honorary secretary, Jomo Kenyatta, and deserves more than a passing glance.

Amy Ashwood had presented "Brown Sugar" at New York's Lafayette Theatre in August 1927, featuring Fats Waller's Band and Sam Manning. Davis's publication of "Calalu Blues" and the Paramount recording in the same year may not have been coincidental. Surmise apart, Davis once again became involved with a person whose career was to fit no stereotyped pigeonhole.

At the same time, Davis was publishing a "character song" written by Sidney Easton entitled "C.O.D. (Cash On Delivery)." On July 7, 1924, Easton signed over all his Canadian rights to Davis. The sheet music shows "Ham Tree" Harrington in blackface and plugs his version on Brunswick 2588. Minstrel shows and blackface comedians had always been favorites with Davis. He later published folios of the songs in 1946 and released records on his Celebrity label of stand-up minstrel skits and songs. Perhaps the old 1920s recording artist John Cali was then a logical man to use on banjo but not everyone would have used tailgate trombonist Lou McGarity on "Trombone Jitters."

One outcome in 1925 of his departure from Ajax would be greater involvement with Columbia and Okeh. Some artists like Monette Moore and Rosa Henderson seemed direct transfers from Ajax. Others, like Maggie Jones, were Davis inspired. A brief perusal of music publishers in the Columbia 14000-D series, which began in 1923 thanks to Frank Walker's initial interest in Bessie Smith, shows several dozen Davis-owned tunes, many records carrying them on both sides. Walker and Davis worked closely together and remained friends all their lives. Walker eventually persuaded Davis himself to record, for Columbia's subsidiary label, Harmony, but before then, Davis became more involved in obtaining recording sessions for the race artists on his roster.

Just one of innumerable Davis tunes recorded at these sessions was Butterbeans and Susie's "Get Yourself a Monkey Man," cut for Okeh in May 1924, composed by Le Roy Morton, then Clara Smith's road manager. Together with Kitty Brown, Morton recorded two Triangle-published tunes for Paramount in mid-1924. "He's Never Gonna Throw Me Down," written by Horace Brooks, and Al Bernard's "Keep On Going." Such examples provide some insight into the depth of Davis's involvement in the black music scene. Further evidence comes from his "Joe Davis Music Co." letterhead, which lists twenty-six titles: two Hawaiian, one "high-class ballad," two "character songs," and no fewer than nineteen "blues" songs.

Davis's substantial involvement in black music continued and became even more complex.

### Joe Had a Way of Experimenting . . .

Louis Hooper, who had participated on many sessions for Joe Davis since commencing with him for Ajax, joined him in 1925 as staff pianist and arranger. Over the years Davis employed a glittering range of star talent in various arranger-writer-staff pianist roles, among them Fats Waller, Andy Razaf, Spencer Williams, Alex Hill, and Paul Denniker. Davis also proudly first published works by such pianists as Harold Arlen, Ferdie Grofe, and Rube Bloom. James P. Johnson's "Carolina Shout" proved so popular that Triangle Music countered with Rube Bloom's "Carolina Stomp," with words by Bartley Costello and an arrangement by Elmer Snowden. A slew of other pianists saw publication in that year by Davis, including Rube Bloom.

Arthur Ray, this time as "Duke Jones," wrote "Bitter Feeling Blues" and together with pianist Mike Jackson wrote "Black Hearse Blues," and an unpublished "Scandal Blues." Louis Hooper frequently crops up, usually as a cowriter with clarinetist Bob Fuller, on the likes of "Charleston Clarinet Blues" and the delightful "Uncle Remus Stomp," which surfaced on a 1925 Harmony recording by Fuller, Hooper, and Snowden as The Three Monkey Chasers. A test pressing of "Uncle Remus Stomp" was sent to English Columbia and has survived.

Veterans Chris Smith, with "Hit Me But Don't Quit Me" and "Triflin' Mama," and Sidney Easton, author of "Last Go Round," were part of the stable, as was Tom Delaney with songs recorded for Columbia by Maggie Jones, "If I Lose Let Me Lose," and Clara Smith, "Troublesome Blues." Pianist Maceo Pinkard chipped in with "I'm a Real Kind Mama," which, despite the sheet music displaying a fetching photograph of Lee Morse with the caption, "The 'Perfect' Record Girl," was never issued on any label by her. She also appears on the cover of the sheet music for "Daddy, Your Mama Is Lonesome for You," part-written by Chris Smith, with music by Jimmy Durante. She didn't record that either.

Benton Overstreet, together with Davis himself, wrote "Take It Easy," and the names Jelly Roll Morton (so credited) and Lovie Austin appear, respectively credited on "Buffalo Blues" and the unpublished "Plain Blue." Other names appear; Irene Scruggs, credited on "Hot Town Blues,"

recorded in 1926 with King Oliver and Luis Russell, while pioneer radio artist Dale Wimbrow wrote "Struttin' at the Funny Paper Ball." The list also includes Marvin Smolev, Grey Gull A&R director, for "Stomp Your Blues Away," "Florida Stomp" by Coleman Hawkins, and the prolific Bob Miller for "Cold Weather Papa."

These last two important artists cropped up later in Davis's musical career. He recorded "Cold Weather Papa" in 1942 by Dolores Brown, one-time vocalist with Erskine Hawkins, during the American Federation of Musicians' (AFM) recording ban. Davis used the cunning—but by AFM regulations, completely legitimate—ploy of using four harmonica players as the accompaniment to avoid breaking the AFM agreement. Two years later he employed Coleman Hawkins for a four-tune session—solo with backing trio—which gave a young Thelonious Sphere Monk his first studio recording engagement on piano.

One of the major music writers for whom Davis gladly found employment was the remarkable Andriamanantena Razafinkarefo, nephew of a one-time queen of Madagascar. Had all of Tin Pan Alley collaborated to invent a fictitious songwriter and grant him an exotic background, they could scarcely have capped reality. In an article in *Storyville* 50 about Andy Razaf, as he was fortunately known, Robert Brackney stated that Razaf's "really big break came in 1928." Although that "break" came about through Joe Davis, it was Davis who gave Razaf his first real chance in 1925. In that year Davis bought his "She Belongs to Me," which Davis was to publish and record himself for Harmony in 1926 with Rube Bloom on piano.

Years later, Davis recalled to Len Kunstadt that Razaf wrote his biggest hits in the bathroom. Be that as it may, in 1925 what impressed Andy Razaf far more was being left on his own on complete trust in Joe Davis's office, long after Davis had gone home for the evening. In all probability it didn't strike Davis as being a very unusual act. He'd finished, Razaf was still working, so Davis left him to complete his own work. Razaf viewed it differently and left a note on Davis's desk, which so moved him, that it was the only item among Davis's memorabilia that was enclosed in a plastic binder, so that the yellowed and slightly tattered sheet of Triangle Music Publishing Company paper would not be further damaged. It is worth quoting in full as it speaks volumes for both men and shows why they remained lifelong friends:

Dear Joe—

I am compelled to let you know how much I appreciate the faith you have in me by leaving me in your office last evening. Words

cannot express my feelings and I do trust that I shall always justify that faith and trust you have in me. A thousand thanks for that check, it saves me from a very uncomfortable situation.

As ever  
Your friend  
Andy

For more about Razaf's life and works, see Barry Singer, *Black and Blue: The Life and Lyrics of Andy Razaf* (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 1995).

Louis Hooper recalled other moments involving Davis from 1925. Davis had obviously hawked his regular recording trio of Hooper, Elmer Snowden, and Bob Fuller round to Victor in October 1925 where, as the Charleston Trio, they tried out Bloom's "Carolina Stomp" and the Hooper-Fuller "Ridiculous Blues." Despite three attempts on both, they were rejected. Hooper recalled that they were

only at Victor once. There was a slight feud going on between Joe Davis and Nat Shilkret who was the chief recorder there. Joe had managed to get an audition for us and for some inexplicable reason, Bob Fuller developed a case of jitters. He muffed two or three important notes and we had had it for that day. Whether or not he played into the hands of Shilkret I don't know . . . we were never permitted to do a re-make. (Kidd, "Louis Hooper," 4)

Interestingly, Hooper also recalled one title—the only one ever issued under the name of trombonist Jake Frazier—on which he and Snowden played. He maintained that "the credit on 'Jake's Weary Blues' should go to Joe Davis. It was his idea. Joe had a way of experimenting . . . different combinations and accompanists" (Ibid.). Issued both on Ajax and Pathe/Perfect, it is noteworthy that the music publishing credits are not to Davis-Frazier but to Hooper-Frazier.

Elmer Snowden adds this story about the Booker's Dixie Jazz Band session of December 1924: "This was a session arranged by Joe Davis, whom I met in 1923 through Bubber [Miley]. In fact, he arranged all of my records. It sounds like these were rehearsed before we made them . . . There were times that we made records every day" (Elmer Snowden, IAJRC 12 notes). It's worth noting that in May 1927 Te Roy Williams and His Orchestra recorded two titles for Harmony and that the trombone-playing Williams was actually fronting Snowden's band. Of the session Elmer recalled that

"Joe Davis used to throw in so many musicians that I couldn't keep track," further confirming Louis Hooper's reference to Davis's constant experimentation (*Ibid.*).

In January 1929 Snowden recorded for Columbia as the Musical Stevedores. In April 1929 he played with some of the group—Louis Metcalfe, Henry Hicks, Charlie Grimes, Charlie Holmes, and others—recording for Okeh as the Jungle Town Stompers, cutting two Davis-published tunes written by Spencer Williams. That same month Snowden recorded with Jasper Davis & His Orchestra for Harmony, with many of the same musicians along with others, including pianist Cliff Jackson. They cut two more Spencer Williams—written/Joe Davis-published tunes: "Georgia Gigolo" and "It Feels So Good" with Lizzie Miles as the vocalist.

In all of the studies of jazz history and of black music in New York City in the 1920s, no Jasper Davis has ever come to light. According to Elmer Snowden, this was a Joe Davis-arranged session, so it was probably a Jos. Davis Orchestra; the only time his name was used (well, almost) on a record label as a bandleader. As the credit to the 1927 Te Roy Williams session was an error—or at least Snowden couldn't "figure out how his name got on the label" (*Ibid.*) as the group was his own Nest Club Band—could it be that Jos. M. Davis somehow became Jasper Davis? Then again, Davis was something of a trickster and might well have been amused by the whole incident.

Spencer Williams continued writing songs for Davis, among them "Get It Fixed," which Davis arranged for one of his favorite singers, Monette Moore, to record for Columbia. Accompanied by Hooper and Rex Stewart, she cut the coauthored Davis song, "Take It Easy," for the reverse. Before that October date, however, another and far more famous Spencer Williams tune, "I Ain't Got Nobody," first appeared on a Clarence Williams session. Originally published in 1916 by Craig & Co., it meandered over to McKinley Publishing in 1916 before finding its way to Triangle.

In early July 1925 Eva Taylor recorded Chris Smith's "Far as I'm Concerned" (copyright, Clarence Williams Music), at a session arranged by Williams and featuring Buddy Christian on banjo. Later in 1925 Christian wrote "Center Street Blues," which Davis published through Triangle. Songwriters placed tunes where they could and publishers, like Clarence Williams, were often content to record songs from another publisher's songbook, such as Joe Davis's Triangle Music. These relationships show the pace and the somewhat ad hoc nature of the fast-expanding music business in the early to mid-1920s.

If they knew them quite well, writers often simply sent letters with possible songs to music publishers. Davis received projected songs from Baby Grice and others through the mail. Louis Hooper recalled a related incident: "This number ["Refrigeratin' Papa"] was sent in the mail to Joe Davis from Wasserman, and when he opened the mail that morning he had me try it over . . . it was just the manuscript in pencil . . . he said that it wasn't great but that he had a hunch about it. . . . 'I'm going to see if I can get Ethel Waters to do it' . . . and he got her" (Kidd, "Louis Hooper," 3). Davis then copyrighted the tune through Triangle Music in 1925, granting Wasserman 2 cents on every piece of sheet music sold and 20 percent of all mechanical royalties received. The Columbia Ethel Waters session occurred in February 1926, and Hooper played piano on that one track.

The white popular and light classical pianist Rube Bloom became closely involved with Joe Davis in 1925. He initially published songs with Davis, who later grouped them in a special folio. For some reason, these Bloom compositions all commenced with the letter "S"; among them "Soliloquy," "Spring Fever," "Sapphire," and "Silhouette." Perhaps he recalled that Ferdie Grofes first published song—again by Triangle Music—had been "Suez." Just possibly Bloom chose a sibilant because he stuttered very badly and could write, if not pronounce, them.

Whatever the reason, he wrote them all in one week. Louis Hooper recalled an interesting moment when Fats Waller and Rube Bloom met for the first time:

I had copied Rube Bloom's "Soliloquy" for publication . . . I knew Rube real well. One day he was in the office (Davis's) . . . Joe was in the outer office . . . Fats Waller wasn't doing too much in those days . . . Joe came in to where we were and whispered to Rube . . . "Fats Waller is at the window" . . . Rube had never met Fats . . . Joe invited him in and introduced him to Rube . . . they talked for a couple of minutes and then Rube asked . . . "Would you mind playing something for us?" Fats . . . sat down and played. Rube didn't take a back seat to anyone . . . he played strictly a Broadway style. They played together over an hour without moving." (Ibid., 4)

Around the same time Rube Bloom also commenced a recording career backing one of Joe Davis's favorite white singers—Peggy English. Bloom, by 1925, was no stranger to a recording studio. Because they worked well together Davis tried to use them on a regular basis. Her records often

popped up under various pseudonyms such as Mae French; she also became Peggy Britten on Cameo, Jane Shaw on Romeo, and Jane Gray on Harmony. Obscure English releases billed her as Lillie Daltry and Nora West, while a 1933 Victor session named her Harlem Hannah. Whatever her name, Davis certainly always had an eye for a good-looking singer, and Peggy English topped his list.

Under its section on Orchestras and Cabarets, *The Billboard* for December 5, 1926, carried a fascinating review of the floor show at The Kentucky Club in New York:

If you must stay up until sunrise, we can't think offhand of a better place to while away the small hours . . . The place, appropriately is in a cellar, with the music and the show correspondingly low-down . . . Peggy English warbles rag songs like few can. Her Vocalion records, for the exclusive canning of which she signed recently, should outsell other similar discs in another year.

And now for the band! If anyone can tell us where a hotter aggregation than Duke Ellington and his Club Kentucky Serenaders can be found, we'll buy for the mob. Possessing a sense of rhythm that is almost uncanny, the boys in this dusky organization dispense a type of melody that stamps the outfit as the most torrid in town.

By the time of this review, Peggy English had recorded half a dozen sessions for Vocalion, featuring Rube Bloom on most if not all the discs. Isn't there just the hint of a plug in this review? Could it have been written for *The Billboard* by Joe Davis, just to plug his singing star? If you think that is fanciful, just remember that English had recorded "Bubber" Miley's "Sweet Man" for Vocalion just three months before. And the trumpet player in the Duke's band at the Kentucky Club was Miley. Because only Joe Davis called him "Bub," is it coincidental that the reviewer in *The Billboard* referred to him as "Bub" Miley?

Irrespective, if the hand of Joe Davis was not directly involved with the *Billboard* review, it most certainly was in arranging two piano solos to be recorded for Harmony in March 1926 by Rube Bloom: "Soliloquy" and "Spring Fever." *The Billboard* for May 1, 1926, mentioned the recordings and that Bloom had been "for many years accompanist for Margaret Young."

Bloom's own previous performing credentials were impeccable. He had recorded as early as September 1924 in Ray Miller's band for Brunswick

with the likes of Frankie Trumbauer (aka Tram) and Miff Mole. The following month he recorded with cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, Tram, and Miff on the famous Gennett session by the Sioux City Six. Shortly thereafter, sessions in December 1924 by the Tennessee Tooters and the Cotton Pickers linked him with both Red Nichols and Phil Napoleon.

His first session with Peggy English, for Vocalion in August 1925, involves a number of musicians with whom he later recorded. Perhaps significantly, when Davis himself came to record in 1926, he used Rube Bloom on piano. Oddly, Bloom never recorded with this group.

While new artists were always entering Joe Davis's stable, he still kept faith with tried and trusted ones, like George Williams and Bessie Brown. "As exclusive Columbia record artists," they had appeared in a full-length photograph on the front of the Davis-published "He's Never Gonna Throw Me Down," written by Horace Brooks. The duo recorded the tune for Columbia early in 1924 and within a year were appearing on Triangle sheet music in a head-and-shoulders shot, and were jointly credited as writers both of words and music. "What Makes Papa Hate Mama So" was recorded at one of their five Columbia sessions in that year with Lemuel Fowler on piano. During this period they also recorded Chris Smith's "Hit Me But Don't Quit Me," this time with Louis Hooper as pianist.

If in 1925 Joe Davis was really only moving further along the path he had begun to map out since late 1923, the second half of the 1920s witnessed a further extension of his artist placement/A&R work and music publishing. Significantly, by the close of the decade, Davis also moved in a series of new directions.



## Chapter Two

# The Melody Man

In October 1924, Eldridge Johnson stated publicly, on behalf of the Victor Talking Machine Company, “that radio is not a Victor competitor nor a substitute for talking machines.” True enough in 1924, but the writing was on the wall because the new all-electric recordings would revolutionize the industry within two years. This technological advancement greatly improved the quality of records such that a brand-new 1928 Okeh record sounded superior to a contemporaneous radio broadcast.

Just the same, radio reception and broadcasting both made great strides. Although the phonograph industry did its best to keep the infant radio under its wing, partly by manufacturing joint radio-phonograph machines, the phonograph manufacturers were slowly losing control. Pittsburgh’s KDKA and Detroit’s WWJ first signed on the air in 1920, but the number rapidly grew to some five hundred stations within two years and doubled to nearly one thousand by 1927.

Whether Joe Davis had an inkling of the shifts in public taste or not, in 1926, the introduction of network broadcasting clearly drew his interest. Davis quickly moved into radio broadcasting in a big way, debuting as an on-air personality. This was also the year in which he first recorded.

Davis broadcast on a wide range of New York radio stations, which proliferated seemingly overnight. The *New York Telegram* for June 30, 1926, stated that “Mr. Davis has no less than three broadcast engagements to sing and play within the next twelve hours. At 3 o’clock he’ll be at WMCA, at 10 o’clock at WMSG, and at 11 o’clock he’ll wind up his day at WFBH. Not much chance of missing him,” which was doubtless as he planned. A self-printed card proclaiming “On The Radio Next Week,” together with portrait photographs of himself at the piano and Carl Smith “tenor,” listed no fewer than eight stations on which they could be heard. Seven tunes were listed from which they would doubtless play, running a fairly full range from “Dark Hawaiian Eyes” and “Honeymoon Waltz” to “Mail

Man Blues” and one of Andy Razaf’s first tunes, “She Belongs to Me.” This exceptionally busy duo could be heard quite regularly, sometimes twice in one day:

WFBH	Monday	May 24	6:30 p.m.
WAAM	Tuesday	May 25	7:15 p.m.
WGBS	Wednesday	May 26	2:00 p.m.
WMCA	Wednesday	May 26	3:00 p.m.
WHN	Thursday	May 27	9:00 p.m.
WMSG	Thursday	May 27	10:15 p.m.
WFBH	Friday	May 28	4:15 p.m.
WMSG	Saturday	May 29	6:00 p.m.
WOKO	Saturday	May 29	8:45 p.m.

They most clearly earned their Sunday off. Noticeably, too, there was only one station (WMSG) on which they appeared more than once during the week. This week failed to include WAHG, which later became CBS, but he played there according to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (July 10, 1926) and the *New York Evening Journal* (November 30, 1926). His own letterhead included WAHG among eight stations, along with WBNY.

Davis’s radio work was widely covered in the city’s newspapers. The *Home News* of August 22 mentioned his appearances on WBNY, WEBJ, WMCA, WAAM, and WHN. The *New York Telegram* of October 25 billed him as “tonight’s best bet” over WFBH at 6:15 P.M. and again reported him on WPCB on December 4, 1926.

Davis had quite clearly found a new way to plug his tunes. The November 30, 1926, advertisement for WEBJ (operated by the Third Avenue Railway System) bills *Joe Davis—The Melody Man* just above *Harold Glenn—California Whistler* and below *Helen Bourne—Maryland Nightingale*. The most interesting act might have been Frank Silver’s Crescent Theatre Jazz Band “by Direct Wire” from the Crescent Theatre. The *Ottawa Journal* for May 6, 1926, carried the reference that “a special White Plains Night program will be presented from 7 to 9 tonight by WEBJ New York. The Broadcast will open with southern melodies by the Clarence Williams Artistes . . . 7.45 will bring the ‘Melody Man, Joe Davis, to the microphone.’”

Frank Walker at Columbia persuaded—or perhaps he was persuaded by—Joe Davis to record. On November 29, 1926, immediately following a Clara Smith session, he recorded “I Don’t Want to Forget” and “I’ve Lost All My Love for You” as The Melody Man (Joe Davis) accompanied by

pianist Cliff Jackson. On a subsequent coupling on Harmony, he used Rube Bloom on piano. "I Don't Want to Forget," coauthored by one-time music salesman Art Gillham, who earned a considerable reputation as Columbia's "The Whispering Pianist." Gillham's gentle, melodic approach suited Davis, always a "melody man," perfectly.

The trade press took up the advance publicity of these records in December 1926 with enthusiasm. The December 11 edition of the *Music Trade Indicator* referred to his recordings "as his most popular ballads, according to the enormous amount of radio mail he received." If this was true—and why should it not be?—then Davis shrewdly suggested to Walker that these titles be recorded. The news was also carried in that day's issues of *Zit's Theatrical Newspaper* and *The Phonograph & Talking Machine Weekly*. Four days later, *Variety* carried the news together with advance publicity for Brunswick and Okeh dates already booked.

Davis obviously wasted no time in expanding this aspect of his career and *The Billboard's* December 18, 1926, notice that "Joe Davis sings for Columbia that Davis has invaded the phonograph field" seemed totally appropriate. It further pointed out in great detail that these first recordings were for Harmony Records, and *The Billboard* journalese, which collectors came to love or loathe, is there in the last line: "for buyers of records Davis warbled 'I've Lost All My Love for You' and 'I Don't Want to Forget.'" In all fairness to *The Billboard*, the verb is highly appropriate.

The following week the December 25 *Music Trade Review* carried a note that Davis had made arrangements to record for Brunswick Records, although Vocalion 15531 with two further ballads appears to have been the only issue. The June 1927 Vocalion monthly flyer plugged the coupling and prominently featured a large photograph of Davis for the front. The same week, the December 22 edition of *The Phonograph & Talking Machine Weekly* reported that "the genial head of the Triangle in a recent conversation, let slip some information which would seem as if he has a hit tune up his sleeve, and is waiting for the proper moment to release it."

It wasn't "White Ghost Shivers," as this had already been mentioned in *The Billboard* on December 18. When Columbia played host to its staff at a gala annual luncheon on December 26, Joe Davis appeared among those entertaining the guests. Master of ceremonies was singer Irving Kaufman, with whom Davis maintained a friendship and eventually recorded when he set up his own recording company in 1942.

Davis also shrewdly purchased an advertisement in the December 29, 1926, *Variety* (including a small, well-drawn sketch of himself), which

thanked Frank Walker for giving him his “break” on Harmony. However, it wasn’t totally a business move for they remained friends for years. When Walker desperately sought a foothold in the burgeoning rhythm-and-blues market in 1952, he turned to Davis for assistance and received it immediately.

The new year continued at a hectic pace for Joe Davis as he remained in the public eye. New Year’s Eve’s *Brooklyn Citizen* carried a note that “WRNY will be silent New Year’s morning, but Alfred Hall’s party at night, promises to be a musical treat” and the list of entertainers included Joe Davis and Al Piantadosi, who later wrote songs for Triangle Music’s first “talkie” in 1929. On January 5 Davis played over WAAM following a Red Cross appeal on behalf of flood sufferers, and the tunes he was plugging on radio continued pouring into Triangle Music.

One way or another he was still scoring “firsts” with pianists. Fletcher Henderson’s “Dynamite” was added, with an arrangement by pianist Elmer Schoebel. Bennie Moten’s “18th Street Strut” was also taken on, although the Okeh recording was cut some six months earlier. Fred Longshaw (Bessie Smith’s accompanist on many of her mid-1920s Columbia sides) contributed “Papa If You Can’t Do Better (I’ll Let Another Papa Move In).” Sidney Easton returned with “Go Back Where You Stayed Last Night,” cowritten with Ethel Waters, who had recorded it the previous July. Davis had thought enough of the tune to have bought it from C. R. Publishing (for whom he occasionally acted as an agent) on Christmas Eve, 1925. On the popular music side, he published Harold Arlen’s first tune, “Minor Gaff” (as Arluck—his birth name was Harold Arluck), and obtained for him his first recording date on piano, with the Buffalodians, on Columbia in May 1926.

Old friends were there with new tunes, too, among them Louis Hooper and Bob Fuller. Citybilly artist Carson Robison weighed in with the topic ballad “The Miami Storm” and a sentimental “An Old Fashioned Picture.” As both a performer and publisher, Davis went for sentimental songs throughout his career.

The Augusta, Georgia, clarinetist and bandleader, Charles Fulcher sold him “Blue for You,” which he had recorded for Columbia the previous year. An earlier Fulcher recording, “Black Cat Blues,” had frequently been covered on record by Joe Davis’s regular studio clarinetist, Bob Fuller. Davis also paid a \$150.00 advance to an old friend, W. C. Handy, for his “Stomp Upstairs.” C. Jackson, possibly pianist Cliff Jackson who replaced Louis Hooper as staff arranger with Davis, wrote the oddly titled “West Indian Overcoat.”

Davis himself had enough time and creativity to cowrite (with Howard Johnson) a fine number, recorded by an excellent New Orleans band, the New Orleans Owls. "Blowin' Off Steam" was cut at their November 1926 session and, as so often happened, Davis remained friends with the band's clarinetist—Pinky Vidacovich—for many years. At their previous session they had cut Fletcher Henderson's "Dynamite." Howard Johnson actually produced a special Triangle Music version of Andy Razaf's "She Belongs to Me" just for film star Mae West.

"I'm Only Another for You" has half credit to M. White. As Mildred White provided yet another pseudonym for Davis, he clearly touched all bases that year. "I'm Gonna Die with My Staff in My Hand" was a black religious song, by one Rev. Jackson, yet one more Davis pseudonym. His hand in both these selections underscore the breath of Mr. Davis's interests and talents.

As Davis threw himself into radio station work and personal song-plugging, his direct involvement promoting female blues singers understandably diminished. Indeed, now that the Ajax period was at an end, and the Pathe and Plaza group links correspondingly reduced, Davis seemed not to have pressed his artists into sessions after the summer of 1926. Maggie Jones did have an unreleased session in October, which included a version of a tune by Monette Moore, "Texas Man," for which Davis held the rights. Davis and Clarence Williams split the music publishing. Davis recorded Andy Razaf's "She Belongs to Me," using Howard Johnson's opening couplet, which he'd planned for Mae West:

Say folks you ought to see,  
Who has been sent to me,  
That certain someone, I've been cravin', cravin'

and brought in Paul Denniker to write new lyrics. The title was changed to "He Belongs to Me" with all three men credited as writers.

Rosa Henderson recorded a session for Columbia in July 1926 but didn't return to the Columbia studio for five years, though Davis obtained brief sessions in the following months for the Plaza group and a 1927 Pathe session. The ever-reliable George Williams and Bessie Brown enjoyed their last session in April 1926 until 1930, when George recorded alone. The one singer who recorded in the autumn of 1926 was Martha Copeland, whose manager Davis became that year. Copeland had not recorded since 1923, then for OKeh, but Davis obtained sessions for her with Columbia

in September and December, using Cliff Jackson and, on the latter date, “Bubber” Miley.

An undated and uncredited cutting among Davis’s effects (probably from a September 1926 *Phonograph & Talking Machine Weekly*) stated: “Martha Copeland, well-known blues singer now featured with the road show of *Shuffle Along*, has just been signed to make race records exclusively for the Columbia Phonograph Co. All her recordings will be under the direction of Joe Davis, of the Triangle Publishing Music Co., who secured the contract for her. Some of her first releases are ‘On Decoration Day,’ ‘Fortune Teller Blues,’ ‘That Black Snake Moan,’ ‘Mine’s Just As Good As Yours,’ ‘Papa If You Can’t Do Better,’ and ‘Black Snake Blues.’”

Davis probably wrote the copy for the last two titles because they were the first to be recorded, while the other four titles were recorded later. “Papa, If You Can’t Do Better” was a recently acquired song from Fred Longshaw and Leo Miller, while “Black Snake Blues” had been a hit for Victoria Spivey, who had always been one of Davis’s favorite singers. “The only thing that gets me,” he told Len Kunstadt, “is this ‘Speevy’ [phonetic pronunciation] thing. I knew her when she was ‘Spyvy’ [phonetic pronunciation].”

In February 1927, Davis booked Martha Copeland into Victor for a session—so much for Columbia labeling her as an “exclusive” artist—which featured “When the Wind Makes Connection with Your Dry Goods,” with an additional vocal from Sidney Easton. If ever a tune sounded like it must have been published by Joe Davis, this was it. Ironically, it wasn’t. Within two weeks Copeland returned to Columbia for the first of a dozen sessions lasting until August 1928.

*The Billboard* for January 1, 1927, carried a short but intriguing report that “Viola McCoy, blues singer, now entertaining at the Club Alabam, Philadelphia, has contracted to record twenty-four numbers during 1927 for the race catalog of the Cameo Company. She will record under the direction of Joe Davis, who obtained the contract for her, and her first two releases will be ‘Papa, If You Can’t Do Better’ and ‘I’m Savin’ It All For You.’”

Viola McCoy all but disappeared due to her lengthy illness following the Edison session in November 1924. Indeed, she didn’t record again until the January 1926 Vocalion session at which the first tune to be recorded was the Davis-published “Stomp Your Blues Away.” A month or so later she again recorded for Vocalion, which included two Davis-published tunes. She recorded no more sides until the entry in *The Billboard* above.

“Papa, If You Can’t Do Better” and “I’m Savin’ It All for You” (both Davis-published tunes) were at the first Cameo session; the later was written by Davis with Spencer Williams. The *Billboard* article suggests she has yet to record the titles; her discography suggests she already had. In all, there were six coupled releases on Cameo—only half the number of titles reportedly contracted for. However, there was a final session in November 1927 at which two titles were recorded but remained unreleased. Surprisingly, the backing band was the California Ramblers but the choice of two of the three titles chosen for the session, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” and “I Ain’t Got Nobody,” bore the clear marks of being Davis organized.

In March 1927, Evelyn Preer, as Evelyn Thompson, recorded for Vocalion. Walt Allen dismissed this as a Fletcher Henderson session and suggested that a Joe Davis group seems more likely. In the same month he had arranged a Pathe session with his stalwart studio men, Louis Hooper and Bob Fuller, as two of the Five Musical Blackbirds, where they cut four titles, all of them Triangle tunes: “Black Horse Stomp,” “Carolina Stomp,” “Hot Coffee,” and “18th Street Strut.”

Despite his involvement with these sessions, he had far less time now for this sort of deep involvement. He continued to be involved with his business colleagues, however. A WEBJ poster for November 19, 1926, included Joe Davis among the many featured performers. Another act was that of “Crooning” Andy Razaf with J. C. Johnson on piano. He also brought in two tunes from Baby Grice, “He’s My Man” (which, for unknown reasons, he copyrighted in Canada) and “Baby Grice Blues.”

His tunes continued to be covered, mostly at Columbia, during 1927. The vaudeville pair of Butterbeans and Susie cut two Davis tunes at their September 1927 session, Porter Grainger’s “‘Tain’t None o’ Your Business” and Thomas “Baby” Grice’s “Jelly Roll Queen.” That same month Bessie Smith cut “Mean Old Bed Bug Blues,” which Davis had copyrighted two weeks before. Lonnie Johnson cut this popular song for OKeh six weeks previously, while Kitty Waters (with Louis Hooper on piano) eventually recorded it in October.

“Mean Old Bed Bug Blues” has a fascinating history. Written in 1918 by Eddie Green and published by Pace & Handy Music, Green made over his rights to that company for \$150.00 in February 1919. Two years later W. C. Handy, together with his brother Charles, took over the music publishing firm of Pace & Handy and reorganized it as Handy Bros. Music. Davis bought the tune from them for Triangle in August 1927 for \$300.00, which also covered advance royalties on the composition. This generous sum



suggests that Davis had decided to obtain it specifically for Bessie Smith. It is also noteworthy that Davis became the first publisher to purchase old copyrights with new recordings in mind. He also became among the first to move in on lapsed copyrights, as many of his catalogue of tunes in the 1930s showed.

If Davis was perhaps less involved in direct placement of many artists into recording sessions, he remained most active in seeing that his songs were covered. *Zit's Theatrical News*, a couple of months after Bessie Smith's "Mean Old Bed Bug Blues" session, carried a clip about Davis saying that "he is specializing mostly in blues and hot tunes and the biggest selling race records today are his publications. The songs are as follows: 'Mean Old Bed Bug Blues,' 'Penitentiary Bound Blues,' 'Roamin' Ramble Blues,' [sic] 'She's Forty With Me,' 'Best Friend Blues.'" The column, which included ten other selections, ended with a short list of his best-selling dance selections—"Alligator Crawl," "My Pretty Girl," and "I Ain't Got Nobody."

Oddly, although Fats Waller recorded "I Ain't Got Nobody" within days of the *Zit's Theatrical News* article, he didn't record "Alligator Crawl" (another Waller-Razaf composition) until seven years later. "Alligator Crawl" was variously entitled "House Party Stomp" and "Charleston Stomp" before its final title was resolved. "My Pretty Girl," written and recorded (for Columbia in 1925) by Georgia bandleader Charles Fulcher, proved popular. But it was presumably the later Jean Goldkette version, with irresistible bass playing by Steve Brown, that helped Triangle Publishing the most.

After his recording debut, Davis returned to Columbia in January 1927 to record two further ballads. In the summer Davis produced his third Harmony release—one side of which was "Me and My Shadow"—and a coupling on Okeh, also with Rube Bloom on piano. None of these selections sold especially well but they helped to cement his position as a recording artist.

The flight of *The Spirit of St. Louis* inspired people on both sides of the Atlantic, and Joe Davis was not the sort of man to miss an opportunity to cash in on the Lindbergh frenzy. In fact, the motivating factor might well have been from Okeh for they made sure of good coverage of the event that summer. Okeh quickly released "Lindbergh" by Noel Taylor (whoever that pseudonym covered if it wasn't Irving Kaufman), backed with "Lucky Lindy" for good measure. Taylor took a second bite with "Chamberlain and Lindy (Our Hats Are Off to You)," released directly following Davis's coupling, having the following release number. The concise title utilized



on Noel Taylor's first Okeh release perhaps expired Davis's grandly titled "Like an Angel You Flew into Everyone's Heart (Lindbergh)," which was coupled with "What Would You Say." In this Lindbergh tribute, Davis thoughtfully named the aviator in parentheses after the title just in case a fickle public had already forgotten and included the memorable couplet:

With God on this throne  
leading you close to home.

Davis recorded again for Harmony in November 1927 and in June 1928. Typically however, he did not hold an exclusive contract with Columbia for he recorded for Brunswick in March as *Zit's Theatrical News* reported on March 14, 1927: "Joe Davis, known around the New York radio stations as the Melody Man, recently recorded two waltz ballads for . . . Brunswick, which will be released within the next few weeks. His only releases are 'I'm Longing For My Old Gal Sal' and 'I'm Only Another For You,' both numbers are published by Triangle Music co." These sides ended up as the only releases for Brunswick (Vocalion 15531), but by that time he already had two more couplings issued on Harmony.

By now the various trade journals supported Davis and Triangle with plenty of publicity and support. An interesting item for the September 7, 1927, issue of *Variety* carried this note: "The Radio Franks on behalf of the Finkenberg furniture house are getting too stereotyped with the same song programs. Sounds very song-pluggerish. Joe Davis (Melody Man of the radio) is a pianologist, who is building a rep and developing a following legitimately."

Davis proved wise enough to avoid the all-too-evident pitfalls of the plugger—repetition and overexposure. Having by now a massive catalogue of songs and a formidable array of entertainment talent to help push his material, Davis could afford not to overweight his own shows with song plugs. An undated but early 1927 edition of *The Phonograph & Talking Machine Weekly* carried a lengthy column headed "Joe Davis to Push 'Oriental Moonlight,'" which states: "Joe Davis . . . has disclosed the title of the number which he kept up his sleeve until the new year broke. It is 'Oriental Moonlight' by Bernie Seaman and Marvin Smolev. . . . He feels he has the biggest song since 'Suez.' Many prominent artists and orchestras have shown their faith in Joe by preparing to feature the number as soon as he says the word. These include the Happiness Boys, Record Boys, Clyde

Doerr, Jack Denny, B. A. Rolfe, Elmer Grosso, Sam Lanin, Ernie Golden, Wheeler Wadsworth, and others.”

*Variety* (July 4, 1927) included an unusual plug for Davis’s “I Ain’t Got Nobody” in its section entitled “Inside Stuff—Music,” under the caption “Heavy Canned Plug”: “An unusual Vitaphone plug for one song is the case of Joe Davis’s Triangle Music Co.’s publication of ‘I Ain’t Got Nobody and Nobody Cares For Me,’ an indigo classic which has been thrice recorded by the talker. Gus Arnheim and his Ambassadors from the Hotel Ambassador, Los Angeles, first ‘canned’ the blues number with his band; then Stoll-Flynn and Co. and more recently ‘The Roaring Forties’ (feature), all Vitaphone releases. Spencer Williams and Roger Graham authored the number.”

Ernie Golden recorded “Oriental Moonlight” for Edison on January 27, 1927, which perhaps explains Davis’s vocal on Golden’s version of “I Ain’t Got Nobody” recorded in September for Edison. Familiar names continued to be published by Triangle Music with Porter Grainger’s name cropping up most frequently, one tune being “Wylie Avenue Blues” that he cowrote with Davis.

To jazz fans “Wylie Avenue Blues” remains one of Grainger’s best-known titles due to its recording by the Halfway House Dance Orchestra in New Orleans the following spring. It was only ever issued on Australian Columbia and Davis must have had to thank his Australian publisher, Albert Music, for its release. Less well known is Martha Copeland’s version, recorded in December 1927, which included Porter Grainger on piano as a member of her Smokey City Trio. Davis almost certainly can thank either Frank Walker or Pinky Vidacovich for the Halfway House Dance Orchestra’s recording of “Wylie Avenue Blues.”

Pianist J. Russel Robinson wrote “It Won’t Be Long Now,” while Lem Fowler turned in “Fowler’s Hot Strut” and an unpublished “Tricky Blues.” The former was recorded by Fowler for Columbia in March 1927 but rejected for issue. Four months later he cut “Hot Strut” for them. Rube Bloom had written “March of the Dolls,” for which he received 4 cents per piece of sheet music sold, 2 percent of orchestration fees, 33⅓ percent on royalties and 16⅔ percent for each word roll. Tom Delaney continued offering numerous titles but some, like “Goopher [*sic*] Dust Blues” and “Grievin’ Mama Blues,” remained unpublished.

Blues singers Clara Smith and Irene Scruggs were credited respectively with “Black Woman’s Blues” and “Sorrow Valley Blues,” the latter having been recorded the previous year in Chicago with a unit from King Oliver’s

band. Presumably whatever connection led Davis to copyright Scruggs's tune also led him to copyright—but not publish—"I Need Some Lovin'" by the band's drummer, Paul Barbarin. Perhaps the Creamer-Johnson tune of the same title caused "I Need Some Lovin'" to underperform.

Meanwhile, Vocalion issued Scruggs's recording of "Sorrow Valley Blues," on its 1000 race series, which Brunswick-Balke-Callender had commenced in March 1926, and placed its management with Jack Kapp. Kapp's brother, Dave, later the head of Decca, was one-third writer of "Should I Be Sorry," published by Triangle in 1927. Davis came to know the Kapps well and, after his first wife died, married into the family.

An intriguing writer credit to two 1927 Triangle tunes, "Corn Bread Blues" and "Levee Camp Moan Blues," was talent scout Polk Brockman, who brought Texas Alexander to New York City to record. Alexander's accompanist (guitarist Lonnie Johnson) had the previous day recorded Davis's "Mean Old Bed Bug Blues" and "Fickle Mama Blues." In keeping with his long-standing habits, Davis remained in contact with Johnson until the guitarist's death in 1970.

Many other blues singers continued to record songs, for both Columbia and Okeh, either published or composed by Joe Davis. Helen Humes's first session in April 1927 began with a Davis composition, "Black Cat Blues." Later that year she recorded four more tunes—"Everybody Does It Now," "Garlic Blues," "Alligator Blues," and "Nappy Headed Blues"—published by Joe Davis. Blue Belle (Bessie Mae Smith) recorded "High Water Blues" at her debut in May 1927, while all four of her songs from her final Okeh session in 1928 were owned by Davis.

Not surprisingly Martha Copeland recorded them one after another. Porter Grainger, under the unusual Davis pseudonym of Jackson, almost preempted the title of Coleman Hawkins's iconic jazz performance of a dozen years hence with "Soul and Body," which Martha Copeland recorded in March 1927. Porter Grainger sold "Good Time Mama" to Davis on October 7, 1927, and one week later Martha Copeland recorded it.

One of his unpublished songs of 1927 was Fats Waller's "Asbestos," though arguably the best-known Waller tune from this year was "Alligator Crawl." The April 9, 1927, edition of *Zit's Theatrical News* carried the note that it "was the latest addition to the Triangle Family of 'Hot Tunes' and that Joe thinks that he will have another 'blues' hit to his credit." *The Metronome* of the following week added that Davis "claims this is a new rhythm in blues and will create a sensation among the orchestras. The

dance orchestration was arranged by Frank L. Ventre, who formerly was a member of Charles Dornberger's Orchestra."

Oddly, Waller didn't record it at either of his May 1927 sessions. During his next full session six months later he did record the Davis-published "I Ain't Got Nobody." He did not commit "Alligator Crawl" to wax until 1934 and then as a piano solo. The reason for this lengthy delay is unknown.

On September 3, 1927, Davis bought "A Blue Feeling" from Waller, again not published, and Davis later added the note, "changed to 'Happy Feeling' 12/11/39" at the bottom. Waller, who often wrote "Thos Waller" on his handwritten, penciled manuscripts, this time signed in full, "Thomas (Fats) Waller." As "Alligator Crawl" became the third title chosen for this tune, perhaps "Blue/Happy Feeling" underwent another metamorphosis.

For the next five years or so Waller worked intermittently for Davis, often collaborating with such writers as Andy Razaf, Alex Hill, and J. C. Johnson. Selections such as "You Gotta Swing It," "It Pays to Advertise," and "Never Heard of Such Stuff" have only Waller's name on them, but they have been properly written out. "Jealous of Me" and "Mighty Fine" have lyrics by Andy Razaf, while "What Will I Do in the Morning" includes words by J. C. Johnson. On the latter, both Johnson and Waller are listed as ASCAP members.

Fats Waller, always a larger-than-life character, stoutly stands at the center of dozens of stories about how he was cheated by many, especially by music publishers. Nonetheless, his relationship with Davis evolved differently and the two men worked closely together for years. Some of that closeness might well have resulted from Andy Razaf's existing friendship with Davis. Whatever the reasons, some of Waller's very finest compositions were written when he was working for—or with—Davis, and Davis clearly served as a direct catalyst in some cases, as with "Alligator Crawl."

By 1929, when Waller actually went to work for Davis, an entirely new avenue of creative employment opened up for Fats; he became a singer. That is often how the general public will remember him but it was as a direct, and persistent, management technique by Davis that it came about. After all, he had been recording steadily since 1922 and apart from a shared vocal with Thomas Morris—who also made no pretense of being a singer—on "Red Hot Dan" from 1927, he did not sing on record. Davis was to change all that, but not for two years.

In November 1927, Davis bought another of Rube Bloom's tunes, "Sapphire." Perhaps regretting his considerable generosity on his contract for

"March of the Dolls," Bloom received 25 percent of all mechanical royalties, 5 cents per sheet music copy, and ½ cents per orchestration for "Sapphire." These figures were much closer to the industry norms than Bloom received for "March of the Dolls."

Always seeking new publishing opportunities, Davis looked toward comic monologs. In August 1927 he took a new step into this field when he copyrighted two unpublished "dramatic works," "Pork And Beans" and "Darky-ology." While an innovation for Davis, such dramatic works never played a major role in his publishing interests.

### Guess Who's in Town

The new year opened in familiar territory. His most regular artist, Martha Copeland, quickly returned to the Columbia studios, although she was then away until May, perhaps touring. Later in January, pianist Art Gillham went into Columbia to cut a couple of Triangle tunes, one of which, "Pussy," hinted at the more risqué selections Davis recorded so often and so profitably in the 1950s. Understandably, "Pussy" and "I'm Just a Rollin' Stone" was released under a pseudonym, but it was less obvious why they were placed in the race 14000 series. Perhaps the nom de disque of Barrelhouse Pete also came from Davis.

Spencer Williams's "Shake It Down" was recorded in the spring by both Lillian Glinn in New Orleans and Clarence Williams's Washboard Five. Just before Glinn cut her version, however, a most unusual recording of a Spencer Williams tune occurred. On April 21, 1928, an otherwise unknown, but forceful, singer named Nellie Florence recorded two titles in Atlanta in the company of Columbia country bluesmen Barbecue Bob and Charlie Lincoln; the brothers Charlie and Robert Hicks. "Jacksonville Blues," credited on Triangle Music to S. Williams, became the first title recorded.

In the late 1920s when a song was recorded and no copyright immediately assigned, then one could be attributed at some later date. Perhaps this is how "Jacksonville Blues" acquired Spencer Williams's name as composer. However, as a prolific writer for Joe Davis, it is possible that some of his songs were circulated among Davis's contacts on the chance that a suitable singer might come forward.

Someone clearly consciously decided that Lillian Glinn should record "Shake It Down" as her debut for Columbia when her touring vaudeville show stopped in New Orleans. A month later, almost to the day, King Oliver

recorded “Shake It Down” for Okeh with Clarence Williams’s Washboard Five. Perhaps Davis had some contact with one of the Atlanta-based A&R men at Columbia, like Dan Hornsby, who had discovered Robert Hicks working at a barbecue pit, hence naming him Barbecue Bob. Once his first coupling had sold well for Columbia, Barbecue Bob was called to New York City for sessions in June 1927. Intriguingly, Hicks stayed at vaudeville performer and blues singer Mamie Smith’s flat, which is how he might have come across Spencer Williams while he was in town.

However, the pattern is rather more complex. Almost a week before Nellie Florence recorded her song, Barbecue Bob had recorded alone in a long six-titled session. One of these songs was “Waycross, Georgia Blues,” which was credited on an early listing of titles owned by Davis’s music publishing houses, none of which were dated later than 1931. Between this session and the Florence session, Barbecue Bob recorded “Black Skunk Blues,” again credited in this listing to Spencer Williams—but given a 1929 copyright date. In October 1928 Barbecue Bob recorded “Cold Wave Blues” and “Bad Time Blues”—both shown as Spencer Williams compositions but dated 1929.

It’s tempting to think that in some cases Spencer Williams gained the copyright to some of Barbecue Bob’s tunes at a later date. In a similar vein, in April 1930 Barbecue Bob recorded yet another Spencer Williams title, “Monkey and the Baboon,” which had been recorded three months previously by Lonnie Johnson and Spencer Williams. In this case, at least, Barbecue Bob was working from a script and the tune had already been published. Only “Monkey and the Baboon” remained on Davis’s listing of titles owned by the end of the decade.

*Zit’s Theatrical Newspaper* for February 4, 1928, carried a report in Chas Weller’s “Song and Dance” column: “Joe Davis and Howard Johnson collaborated on the new Triangle waltz ballad entitled: ‘You’d Rather Forget Than Forgive.’ It is the number one plug song of the Triangle [*sic*] and the early reports on the song look as though it will be one of the biggest sheet music sellers Triangle has had in a long time. Orchestras and acts are very much enthused over the number. It has already been set for a recording on practically every roll and record for an early release. Joe Davis recorded the song himself for Harmony records and it was recorded for the Columbia records by Art Gillham.”

Although this sounds as if Davis had himself written this as a press release, it places his work clearly in perspective. This column emphasizes “You’d Rather Forget Than Forgive” more than tunes that, to a jazz or blues

enthusiast, would seem far more worthwhile. Triangle Music was, after all, in the business of making money and these ballads sold pretty well. Just to be sure that it reached the widest audience, the sheet music for “You’d Rather Forget Than Forgive” carried this caption above the Triangle logo and address: “Complete copy for sale at your local music dealer or send 35c for each copy to the publishers.”

On February 17, 1927, the *New York Evening Telegram* carried a report about “Joe Davis, melody man of the McAlpin station ‘who’ had the right idea last night when he crooned out several numbers on the order of ‘My Blue Ridge Mountain Home.’ Joe, to us, has one of those easy-flowing come-along-with-me voices that take the bumps of the ether nicely. In other words he is a good jazz singer and we like him.” The song mentioned was a Carson Robison–written hillbilly song. In that same year Davis published more arguably genuine songs, such as “My Carolina Home,” by Clayton McMichen, Bert Layne and Lowe Stokes, all Georgia-bred artists who recorded extensively in Columbia’s 15000 country music series.

More interestingly from a jazz standpoint, the *Baltimore Afro-American* of March 10, 1928, reported that Jelly Roll Morton was in New York, “collaborating with Chris Smith in writing new tunes.” Perhaps two of these were “Ham and Eggs” and “Buffalo Blues,” recorded three days later for Columbia by Johnny Dunn’s band, which included Morton as the pianist. Triangle published both tunes but only Morton was credited as a writer.

In the summer of 1928 Davis obtained Andy Razaf and J. C. Johnson’s “Dusky Stevedore,” a song he quickly and emphatically pushed with the whole Triangle promotional organization. Pop vocalist Roy Evans—with James P. Johnson at the piano—recorded it in June for Columbia. Backed by an earlier hit, “I Ain’t Got Nobody,” Columbia initially and inexplicably released it in the hillbilly 15000 series, but “Dusky Stevedore” was swiftly re-released in the popular Columbia series.

Columbia thought sufficiently highly of the song to take the whole front page of the August 8, 1928, issue of *The Phonograph & Talking Machine Weekly* to plug their release of Columbia 1449-D. “Here’s one of the greatest records ever made,” it claimed, showing a photograph of Evans and the artwork of the front of the Triangle sheet music. The magazine also pictured the window of H. A. Weymann’s music store in Philadelphia, which gave over its entire display to “Dusky Stevedore,” reminiscent of the superb store fronts depicting “Suez” in 1922.

The same column also commented that Columbia planned a release of this title by Thelma Terry and her Playboys, “with a vocal chorus by Joe Davis.”



The session took place on September 27, 1928, and Davis took over on drums. It would have been a remarkable enough swap in roles for him even had he not replaced swing-era legend and longtime Benny Goodman sideman Gene Krupa for the date. The sheet music carried a front photograph captioned "featured by Rudy Vallee," showing Vallee holding his alto sax.

The National Press Clipping Bureau sent an entry from *Zit's Theatrical Newspaper* for June 30, 1928, which mentioned that "the big orchestra hit of today is 'Dusky Stevedore,'" though the piece was headed that "Joe Davis . . . has released a new piano solo entitled 'Punch and Judy' by Paul Vincent," following which was a note that "Ted Lewis's next Columbia record release will be Joe's famous songs, 'I Ain't Got Nobody' and 'A Good Man Is Hard To Find.'" These were from March sessions. The clipping ended with the statement that "the new novelty blues number, 'All Day Long,' Davis's new waltz, is one of Vincent Lopez's favorite tunes." Lopez and Davis were friends, but this note sounds as if Davis had himself written this entry (given his love of a waltz) on the hope that Lopez might record it for Brunswick, the popular bandleader's recording company. If so, this ploy did not succeed.

Jackson and His Southern Stompers recorded "Dusky Stevedore," backed by another 1928 Triangle published Andy Razaf-J. C. Johnson composition, "Take Your Tomorrow (Give Me Your Today)," on a seven-inch Marathon disc. Speculation remains as to the correct identification of this band. Eva Taylor, Clarence's wife, thought the Jackson might have been Mike Jackson, who happened to be in Canada at the time. Bearing in mind that "Rev. Jackson" was one pseudonym that Davis himself used and that he had also published a Porter Grainger tune in 1927 under the nom de plume of "Jackson," the name might also be a Joe Davis-arranged group. The November 10, 1928, *The Billboard* proclaimed the following under a heading which read:

#### Joe Davis Has a New Hit

The new "Joe Davis" song, "Take Your Tomorrow (and Give Me Today)," by Andy Razaf and J. C. Johnson, looks like another hit for the Triangle Music Company's catalog. The song is by the writers of "Dusky Stevedore" and has already been recorded 100 per cent and is being featured by a number of orchestras and radio artists. The dance orchestration was arranged by Bob Haring and is reported to be one of his best works.



As always, while Joe Davis chased potentially big hits, he also continued steadily building up his publishing catalogue. Victoria Spivey returned with “New Black Snake Blues” and “T.B. Blues,” her best-selling record after “Black Snake Blues.” The Joseph M. Davis Company published “T.B. Blues” and by now his music publishing scene began increasing in complexity. Many contemporary tunes added to the catalogue came under the Georgia Music banner, which began to share the honors with Triangle.

Bessie Mae Smith published some songs from her December 1927 Okeh, such as “Ghost Creepin’ Blues.” The copyright entry card (E687863, April 19, 1928) gives her name as Bessie A. Smith but when she submitted the lyrics to two other tunes recorded by Okeh in December 1928, she signed “Good Feelin’ Blues” as Blue Belle (Bessie Smith), and “It’s Heated Red Hot” as Bessie (Blue Belle) Smith. Both were presumably typed on her typewriter for the ribbon carriage is worn and the writing is half in red and half in dark blue.

Andy Razaf came up with “My Handy Man,” which bought both fame and notoriety to several artists, among them Ethel Waters and Elsie Carlisle. Ethel Waters’s session in August 1928 featured James P. Johnson on piano (as well as another Razaf tune, cowritten with J. C. Johnson, “Guess Who’s in Town”), and in October, Victoria Spivey recorded a memorable version featuring King Oliver on cornet.

With Paul Denniker—and what a team they were to become—Andy Razaf wrote a hopeful “Mr. Swing for President,” but Herbert Hoover won. Spencer Williams, always willing to try another angle, came up with “Melancholy Yodel Blues,” perhaps hoping to give Roy Evans another hit based on his debut “Weary Yodelin’ Blues.” Davis never published Williams’s melancholy effort.

*Zit’s Theatrical Newspaper* (September 8, 1928) noted that Davis “hit the nail on the head as usual.” The writer further stating that “Joe Davis . . . is doing a big business for a small publisher. And the reason is, Joe knows how.” This observation was certainly true for many of the songs Davis bought in for publication. The objections of some critics to the process whereby a song was bought for \$1.00 should be set against the obvious philanthropy of paying for the likes of Spencer Williams’s “German Blues”:

I’m here in Dutchland, where they make limburg cheese,  
 I’m here in Dutchland, where they make limburg cheese,  
 You can surely smell it floatin’ on the evening breeze.  
 They took my dashund [*sic*], ground him up to sausage meat,

They took my dashund, ground him up to sausage meat,  
Reason why I knew it, 'cause I smelt my dashund's feet.

It says much for Davis that he actually paid money for this, but more for the fact that he avoided recording it, although it was assigned to Aloha Music.

Joe Davis continued using pseudonyms on Triangle Music. Barrett (none other than the prolific Carson Robison) is credited with "Little Marion Parker," one of the southern death-story ballads, which apparently sold well. "Hand Me Down My Walking Cane" is credited to E. V. Body, perhaps a neat way of suggesting it is really public domain; is it "everybody?" Whatever the answer, the name was yet another pseudonym for Joe Davis.

Joe Davis also continued to appear on radio. One amusing entry in the *New York American* for July 13, 1928, reported on two "Aerial Artists" appearing that night on WHN. One was "Joe Davis, a favorite on the air," and the other was "Cordelia Makarius, physical culturist," who spoke about the value of sunbaths.

Davis received a fascinating letter from Frank Walker of Columbia, dated December 11, 1928, "too late in the evening," as Walker stresses, written from the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans:

Dear Joe,

Good trip so far and lots of good records (we hope) but who can tell, they may all be punk, but at least we're trying. Arrived here this morning and will be here until next Monday night [December 17], then a couple more stops on the way and reach home Sat. night in time to play Santa Claus to my brood of youngsters.

In fact Walker seems to have rested up a little in New Orleans as he recorded fewer selections than on an earlier trip. Nonetheless, he recorded jazz bandleader Oscar Celestin two days later. The final day must have been busy for he not only recorded two blues groups, Dorothy Everetts with a pianist and a black string band, the Jackson Blue Boys (Charlie McCoy, Walter Vincson, and Bo Carter), but also the final Halfway House Dance Orchestra session.

Walker wrote further in his letter about illness in the Davis household, stating that he had just been in Dallas where, on his previous trip in December 1927, he had contracted chicken pox. Those two field trips in 1927 and 1928 to Dallas produced some truly remarkable sessions from

some of the finest Texas blues and gospel artists of the 1920s, including Washington Phillips, the Dallas String Band (featuring Coley Jones), Blind Willie Johnson, and Otis Harris.

No wonder Walker wrote about waxing “lots of good records.” He ended his letter with the reminder that Walker would see Davis on December 26. Presumably, then, the Columbia “house party” would take place once more, as it had done the previous year. Whether Joe Davis would be on the stage or among the guests was not clear.

## Chapter Three

# Fats Comes Aboard

Without doubt the most significant events of 1929 for Davis's publishing companies were the collaborations of Fats Waller and Andy Razaf emanating from the show *Hot Chocolates*, and the subsequent Waller-Davis cooperation on many future projects. This collaboration lasted well into the 1930s, but 1929 was, even without the Waller connection, yet another successful year for Joe Davis. The year 1929 began with such bright hope and optimism but ended darkly when the United States's stock market crashed at the end of October, plunging the entire world in a severe economic funk that lasted throughout the next decade.

The year kicked off nicely for Davis, too, with his own recording of OKeh 41148, "If You Would Say I Love You" and "I'm Sorry, Sally." *Variety* for January 9, 1929, stated that Davis "does brightly, handling the pops in great style." The same columnist commented on the "snappy dansapation" of Frankie Trambauer's "Take Your Tomorrow" and "Love Affairs" (OKeh); Ellington's snappy foxtrots, "I Must Have That Man" and "Bandanna Babies," and "Digga Digga Do" and "I Can't Give You Anything But Love Baby" on Victor. Perhaps to add some balance, he also noted longtime Philadelphia Orchestra conductor Eugene Ormandy's "popular appeal" as a violin soloist on OKeh 41147.

In early January the *Music Trade Review* noted that Davis "has announced that his new 'plug' song for 1929 will be 'Susianna' . . . and is doing everything in his power to put it over." *Zit's Theatrical Weekly* for February 2, 1929, proclaimed that "Spencer Williams' new song hit entitled 'Susianna' was just recorded by Lee Morse. [December 7, 1928.] Joe Davis . . . predicts that this song will be a big hit, as it is already showing up exceedingly well in the sale of sheet music and orchestrations."

A March 30 Davis advertisement in *The Billboard* announced that Triangle published eight dance selections specially arranged for small (four-seven piece) bands, including "Dusky Stevedore," "I Ain't Got Nobody," "A

Good Man Is Hard to Find” and, of course, “Susianna.” Only 25 cents each, it proclaimed “so, why pay more money for arrangements that do not fit your combination?” This approach to marketing proved effective and *Metronome* for April 1929 stated that Davis was on the road for two weeks to push “Susianna” and others. Perhaps this punishing travel schedule forced Davis to employ Bill Gedney at Triangle to handle orchestrations, radio, and “plugs,” as well as to concentrate on “Susianna.”

*Metronome* for May 1929 followed up Davis’s shrewd marketing of compact orchestrations: “‘It Ain’t No Fault Of Mine’ . . . was one of a flock of shorter orchestrations that Joe Davis is rushing to the waiting world . . . The number makes fun of ‘Jingle Bells,’ ‘London Bridge’ and, for all we know to the contrary, the quartet from ‘Rigoletto.’” Amusing as “‘It Ain’t No Fault of Mine” might have been, the big hit for Davis came the following month with “S’posin,” which firmly secured the future collaboration of Andy Razaf and Paul Denniker. “S’posin” also secured ASCAP membership for Razaf, who became one of the most clever and popular lyricists of the 1930s.

Among many to rate its instant success, the musical columnist of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* of June 30, 1929, placed the song as “its ‘Week’s Best Bet.” Significantly the columnist observed that “S’posin” came to her “first over the radio. Since then I’ve heard it locally from our own bands . . . There’s a rather heavy attempt in the lyrics to be whimsical and Hart-and-Rodgersish, but in spite of that, the piece contains its cuteness.”

This remarkably perceptive note suggests the writer is not about to leap aboard a rolling bandwagon without raising her pen against:

S’posin’ I should hold you and caress you,  
Would it impress you,  
Or distress you . . .

Her comments also demonstrated Davis’s success in plugging it heavily over the air as well as by way of sheet music—per her observation that the song could be heard “locally from our own bands.” *Metronome* the following month praised Davis for having “done the unbelievable in putting ‘Sposin” [sic] into the hit class in less than two months.”

This success probably surprised even Davis. *The Billboard* for July 13 carried his advertisement for “Cool Off” (cowriter bandleader Jack Pettis), “Dallas Blues,” and “Georgia Gigolo” and with a typical Davis touch, the heading stated “Few New Sizzling Hot Tunes 50c each,” with “Cool

Off" listed first. "S'posin" was notably absent, but perhaps Columbia had greater faith for their full-page advertisement in the *Talking Machine & Radio Weekly* for July 10, 1929, showed their release of "S'posin" on Columbia 1876 by Ford and Glenn.

Naturally, Davis quickly cashed in on the success of "S'posin" with a spate of Razaf-Denniker songs, often with similar titles. *The Hollywood Filmograph* for August 3, 1929, carried the lines, "Andy Razaf and Paul Denniker, writers of that overnight hit, 'S'posin' have just written another entitled 'Won'tcha?' . . . Say Joe Davis, 'S'posin' your new venture was as successful as the last, Won'tcha be glad?" He most certainly would have been, but it wasn't. A week later *Zit's Theatrical Weekly* shouted, "Get a load of Paul Whiteman playing Joe Davis's song hit, 'S'posin' during his weekly broadcast from the coast on the 'Old Gold Hour' over the entire network of 54 radio Stations on the Columbia chain." Whiteman recorded the song on May 16 at a session including Bix Beiderbecke, although not on that title. Bing Crosby, who was just beginning his career, handled the vocal. Phil Spitalny recorded "Won'tcha" for Edison but the person who broke it first was Davis's old buddy from earlier days, Rudy Vallee. Not only did he cut it for Victor, also in May, but Vallee closed his stage show at New York's Paramount Theater with "Won'tcha."

A syndicated release both in *The Billboard* and *Exhibitors Herald-World* for August 24, 1929, as well as *The Metronome* for September stated that Davis had, "at the time of writing, one of the most envied catalogs in the music business . . . 'S'posin' has struck a responsive chord with the public . . . and shows no signs of abating in popularity." Perhaps buoyed by his success, within the year Davis bought out his partners in Triangle Music. Until then, he pushed ahead with publicity for his expanding catalogue.

*The Billboard* for September 7, 1929, carried four separate advertisements, all for Razaf-Denniker collaborations. They included "S'posin" and "Won'tcha" but also "Perhaps," which eventually broke just as big for him, if not larger, though not for some eighteen years. Two weeks later the *Exhibitors Herald-World* reported that "Andy Razaf and Paul Denniker . . . have just signed an exclusive two year contract with Joe Davis, president of Triangle Music Corp." A month later *The Metronome* stated that Davis was "rushing through press on 'You'll Always Be Welcome,' a brand new waltz by Andy Razaf and Paul Denniker whose 'Sposin' [sic] and 'Perhaps' you never heard—no, not much."

The previous month, *The Metronome* published a two-column article on Triangle Music and Joe Davis, with a photograph of him. It commenced

with the observation that “music publishing history is dotted here and there with instances of small firms gradually expanding to leadership; with ambitious individuals capitalizing on their ability; with songs rising to the public’s lips after having their birth in the offices of obscure publishing houses.” It was a spot-on précis of Triangle Music and ended with: “a romantic story has been unfolded before you in the above chapters, a story of a man who by dint of his own efforts, initiative and concentration has made of himself a power in the world of music—Joe Davis, himself!” Elsewhere, the article called Davis “a composer, pianist, singer, mechanical man, executive, and one of the music industry’s best liked and most favorably known individuals.” Because the entertainment industry in general revels in eulogy and exaggeration, this accurate assessment of his place in the music business remains highly unusual.

By the end of 1929 Triangle jumped into films, or as the *Music Trade Review* of January 1930 put it, “Triangle Music Co. has its first talkie.” Triangle published all the songs in *The Talk of Hollywood*, featuring Nat Carr and Fay Marbe, a Mark Sandvick production distributed by Sono-Art-World Wide, according to *Film Daily* (December 9, 1929). *Metro-nome* for December 1929, under a caption stating, “Triangle Music. Pub. Co. Expanding,” contained the fact that the company was taking on extra premises at 1658 Broadway to cope with increasing trade. It further stated that “Mr. Davis just returned from a trip through the Middle West, visiting Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Kansas City, and St. Louis, which shows the extent to which he pushed his stock by personal appearance.” The article also mentioned that publishers had in general discontinued “act songs” and substituted “theme songs.” Bearing all the hallmarks of being straight from the horse’s mouth, it pointed out that while most publishers were “killing the goose that laid the golden egg, by raising the wholesale price,” there was “no justified reason for a publisher to raise his price on a theme song, because he really has eliminated the tremendous cost of exploitation that the average popular song has to have.” Davis, of course, remained devoted to selling songs.

Although Razaf and Denniker, along with Fats Waller, dominated 1929 in some ways, Davis continued to build and expand his acquisitions with songs from well-known writers. White Atlanta bandleader and clarinetist Charles Fulcher came in with “Atlanta Gal,” which he recorded for Columbia. Luis Russell wrote two hot-jazz numbers, “Jersey Lightning” and “Feelin’ The Spirit.” Paul Barbarin’s “The Call Of the Freaks” and Spencer Williams’s “Basin Street Blues” (bought from McKinley Music in Chicago

in April for one thousand dollars) and “Dallas Blues” added significantly to the Triangle catalogue.

Carson Robison and Vernon Dalhart continued to produce songs like “Death Of Floyd Bennett,” while the Robison song folio included many of unknown parentage—or lapsed parentage—which became copyrighted as by E. V. Body. *The Music Trade Review* for December 1929 noted that Triangle had bought “After You’ve Gone,” saying that “Mr. Davis is planning an active campaign to make it even more successful.” One notable handwritten lead sheet, “Zig Zag” by Alexander Hill, who had proudly written after his name, “writer of ‘Beau-Koo-Jack,’” and found among Davis’s effects, might date from 1929. Clarence Williams cut “Beau-Koo Jack” for QRS about December 1928, though Davis apparently didn’t publish it. Art Gillham continued to write the likes of “Then I’ll Be In Heaven” and Bob Miller gained part credit on the satirical “Leven Cent Cotton,” with its powerful statement on behalf of the small farmer. Ed Claypole, who wrote “Ragging The Scale,” added “Oriental Fantasy” to his repertoire.

Wesley Wilson began to turn in titles. As one-half of Pigmeat Pete and Catjuice Charlie he cut his own “Get Your Mind Out The Gutter”—at least, that’s how the contract named it—for Columbia. A letter from Wilson to Frank Walker at Columbia in September 1929 informed Walker that he had made over his “Let’s Get It Straight” to Davis, who secured the rights to the tune on the very day—July 18—that Wesley Wilson recorded it for Columbia. Two days later “Let’s Get It Straight” was copyrighted at the Library of Congress. Rather more than ten years later, photostats of this information were returned to Davis from Decca Records with the note that, “I have no place for them in my files.” The writer was J. Mayo Williams, longtime A&R man and one of the first important black record executives.

While Davis moved farther afield, he remained involved with blues songs and their recording, although the bottom was to fall out of the race market—and almost the entire phonograph market—after the crash in the autumn of 1929. Trusted vocalists like Clara and Bessie Smith covered “Empty House Blues” and “I’m Wild about That Thing,” among others. Viola McCoy and Ethel Waters covered Davis’s songs and the Nonpareil Trio, as well as Irving Kaufman, recorded “Susianna.” Two sessions recorded consecutively on November 2, 1929, in Atlanta showcased Georgia Music publications, perhaps due to the hand of Polk Brockman or Dan Hornsby. Alec Johnson’s extremely folksy titles—such as “Next Week Sometime” or “Sundown Blues”—would seem to be simply a case of copyrighting some long-extant songs, but Spencer Williams wrote



“Miss Meal Cramp Blues” and who gave Barbecue Bob Mike Jackson’s “Meat Man Pete” to record?

Another Spencer Williams song, “It Feels So Good,” soon caused a fuss of a different nature. Several singers recorded it, among them Lizzie Miles, who waxed it for Harmony with Jasper Davis & His Orchestra. Davis himself preferred to recall that it was Lonnie Johnson’s version that caused the fuss. One Boston distributor was apparently jailed and fined \$500.00 because of the suggestive lyrics, following which, Davis reckoned that the records then sold under the counter for up to \$10.00 each. This controversy heralded by well over thirty years the sort of trouble in which Davis would find himself when the LP market began to boom.

Davis loved to advertise and *Metronome* for September 1929 carried a three-color, two-page spread on Triangle hits, some fifteen inches high and almost two feet wide. *The Billboard* for November 29, 1929, which was the Chicago Convention issue, carried a full back page, two-color advertisement for “After You’ve Gone,” with portraits of forty-five bandleaders, including many shots of bandleaders seldom otherwise pictured. The top left corner includes Paul Whiteman, Rudy Vallee, and Ted Lewis while the top right includes Ted Weems, Vincent Lopez, and Nat Shilkret. Most of the popular and sweet bands that mattered are there, but Louis Armstrong is the sole black performer. Still, when did you last see photographs of Ace Brigode, Milt Shaw, George Olsen, and Ernie Golden? With Davis’s old friend Rudy Vallee well to the front, it is worth mentioning as an aside that Vallee received a percentage from the sales of “S’posin’” for helping to break it.

Apart from Duke Ellington, more has been written about Fats Waller than any other early jazzman. The importance of the relationship between Davis and the talented pianist/entertainer, however, has been both underestimated and misunderstood. This mutually beneficial relationship lasted into the early 1930s, a period when Waller began his ascent into popularity and was arguably near the height of his creativity.

Early in 1929 Fats Waller and Andy Razaf began writing songs for the Connie’s Inn show, “Hot Chocolates,” which opened at New York City’s Hudson Theatre on June 20, running for over two hundred performances before it went on the road. “Hot Chocolates” proved so popular that a second show took place every night at Connie’s Inn. Waller found himself under pressure for an increase in child support money and alimony to his ex-wife, Edith, and panicked into selling his rights to songs in the show to Irving Mills for \$500.00. As a result, the Waller-Razaf team, in the words

of Waller's son, Maurice, "picked up Joe Davis as their new publisher" (Maurice Waller and Anthony Calabrese, *Fats Waller* [London: Cassell, 1978], 89). In view of Razaf's friendly relationship and respect for Davis, to say nothing of his own success and financial improvement with "S'posin," Razaf might have suggested the move.

As Maurice Waller puts it:

Davis, a hard-nosed businessman, offered Dad a job, a contract for management, and asked for right of first refusal (a guarantee that he would be the first publisher to hear Dad's music). Davis also wanted Dad on hand to play piano for any songwriters or vocalists who visited the office. He agreed to pay Dad a weekly salary, royalties, and two bottles of booze a day. It was a new and very unpleasant experience for Fats Waller from ten to five, writing songs in a small room. But Joe Davis worked closely with my father and several of his best piano solos were written or developed under Joe's supervision. He helped refashion "Charleston Stomp" and renamed it "Alligator Crawl." Davis was also the overseer on "African Ripples" and "Clothesline Ballet." (Ibid.)

This is a very frank and very fair assessment of Davis's part in Waller's career at this stage. Davis would have been proud of having been described as a "hard-nosed businessman," for which he had the reputation all his life, and he would have been extremely proud of Maurice Waller's recognition.

He worked closely with Waller, but always respected the pianist's immense and varied talents. As Maurice Waller acknowledges, it was no accident that some of Fats's finest pieces saw completion under the watchful ear of Davis and that some of the best Razaf-Waller lyric combinations emerged from this short collaboration. Considering the fraught situation after the sale of the "Hot Chocolates" compositions, it is indeed fortunate that this pair turned to Joe Davis. "Joe was extremely pleased with his new client," recalled Maurice Waller, "and helped keep him in almost constant demand for recordings" (Ibid., 90).

Waller recorded steadily for Victor during August and September 1929 but in November Davis had him join Don Redman's group, McKinney's Cotton Pickers. He also participated in sessions backing Gene Austin—who insisted on Waller's presence as accompanist—and with James P. Johnson's band. Solo and band sessions for Victor occurred in December, the latter being another integrated band—including trombonist Jack Teagarden and reedman Larry Binyon—issued as Fats Waller and His Buddies.

Thus, for Joe Davis, the “Jazz Age” of the 1920s stumbled into the Depression of the 1930s just when he joined forces with one of the best-known popular pianists of the century. While he could not have been aware of the future legacy, he was well aware of Waller’s teeming talent. A nine-to-five schedule simply didn’t suit Waller, who clearly needed a degree of discipline. Perhaps Joe Davis supplied just what was needed, however inconvenient, at the moment when Waller’s immense talents as a writer and pianist were poised to reach a large, popular audience. To jazz fans, he is perhaps foremost a pianist but to ordinary people who listened to Waller, he was a jovial, effusive singer, who played piano. Significantly, Joe Davis made him a singer.

An interesting appendix to close this decade concerns the obscure QRS record company. The company’s jazz and blues releases from 1928 to 1929 are highly valued by collectors and early in 1929 it added a new 1000 series. According to information found on the label, these were recorded by Cova Recording Corp., New York City, and are probably scarcer than the usual 7000 and 9000 series. No fewer than four were among Davis’s effects, with Q-1001 by the Cova Cavaliers singing a 1922 Triangle tune, “How Long Must I Wait for You.”

Presumably, the series did start as late as 1929, as originally postulated by Carl Kendziora, when QRS was bought out by DeVry Corp., a motion picture firm. However, the reverse of Q-1001 is “Mona,” “From Fox Movietone *Happy Days*.” Q-1004 contained a 1926 part Davis-written “Night Time Is Love Time” by Carl Fenton’s Orchestra, which recorded Paul Deniker’s 1927 “Bless Her Little Heart” on Q-1005. QRS released Q-1013 by the “Crooners,” a “Male Quartet with Piano,” who recorded Willard Robison’s “There’s Religion in Rhythm.” Although they sang an uncredited “Medley of Sea Shanties” on the reverse, it is possible that Davis served as the A&R man for this session.

When Kendziora wrote his initial article on this label (Carl Kendziora, “Behind the Cobwebs,” Record Research, nd), he referred to the series apparently “beginning at Q-1000 or Q-1001, although the known range to date is Q-1004 to Q-1055.” Brian Rust, in the *American Label Book*, states that the catalogue series is “Q-1000 to at least Q-1055” (260). Whether or not a Q-1000 actually exists is not clear, which means that the earliest known to Kendziora contained a Triangle tune. Three Triangle tunes in the first half dozen or fewer releases suggest that Davis almost certainly had a toehold in the Cova Company from its inception.

## Wall Street and Songwriting

The facts of the Great Depression following the collapse of the stock market in October 1929 are well documented. But it is all too easy to overlook the implications of the sometimes glamorous affairs of entertainment; after all, it is for many a world of fantasy, of wonder and awe, way beyond the mundane world of everyday people. Given the economic and social hardships caused by the Great Depression, the world of entertainment provided much needed, if ephemeral, escape from the daily realities.

Ironically, just when Joe Davis employed perhaps the greatest musical entertainer of the 1930s, the world was sliding toward its worst financial disaster for centuries. Nonetheless, for many months the specter of massive unemployment, and the resultant drop in spending potential, hardly appeared to hinder Joe Davis's schemes. Phonograph record sales plunged from a total of 104 million in 1927 to 6 million in 1932, largely because of the increase in free radio broadcasting, but also due to the Depression. Unemployment figures, which had risen to over 4 million in 1930, swelled to 12 million by 1932. Davis's income gradually shifted from phonograph record royalties to royalties from sheet music sales, but in the end the drop in purchasing power began to tell.

In a move typical of Davis, he bought out his partners in Triangle Music in the month of the first anniversary of the great Wall Street crash. He continued to push the songs of such talented tunesmiths as Fats Waller, Andy Razaf, Spencer Williams, and indeed himself, and added others of the caliber of James P. Johnson and Alex Hill. He continued to see his tunes placed with Columbia until the inevitable demise of the label: James P. Johnson's "A Porter's Love Song (To a Chambermaid)" being within a dozen releases from the end of the 14000-D race series.

Songs came thick and fast in 1932 and 1933, slowed down dramatically, and then picked up again later in the 1930s as stability returned. Triangle Music's catalogue expanded slowly, although Davis gradually shifted toward folios of sheet music rather than individual songs. Folios were sometimes marketed under the composer's name, but more usually grouped tunes suitable for the piano using a collective heading, such as "Hawaiian" (for which demand seemed to continue) or "Cowboy."

The Davis eye for a quick gimmick or a timely song remained, for late in 1929 Spencer Williams knocked out "President Hoover March." The *Music Trade Indicator* for February 1930 shrewdly commented thus "Joe Davis,

who is always Johnny-on-the-spot has done it again." Gus Haenschen began the pattern in 1920 with his "President Harding March," which was followed up three years later by "President Coolidge March."

Davis pushed Fats Waller's "Blue Turning Grey Over You"—an early birth from the recently absorbed Waller-Razaf team—and took a three-week advertisement in *The Billboard* during February, including a batch of Triangle tunes being featured then by bandleader Paul Tremaine over the CBS radio network. Davis's involvement in film music continued for a while, too. The London *Daily Film Renter* for March 27, 1930, stated that "Love at First Sight, the theme song of the Butcher talkie, has been secured . . . by the Lawrence Wright Co., in conjunction with the Triangle Music Publishing Co., of New York." Lawrence Wright, who lived in Leicester and who founded *Melody Maker* magazine in 1926, handled all of Davis's British business interests.

Razaf and Waller's success was not lost on New York's theater district. In May 1930 Davis drew up a contract for Andy Razaf to write for Lew Leslie's "Blackbirds of 1930" and a month later Razaf finalized matters with Shapiro, Bernstein & Co. to collaborate with Eubie Blake to originate and write "the lyrics, verses, words and music and entire score of a new musical comedy." Despite a cast including Ethel Waters and Buck and Bubbles, and a score featuring "Memories of You," it lasted only twenty-six performances.

With Waller, Andy Razaf produced "Prisoner of Love" but wrote "On Revival Day" himself, which Bessie Smith recorded on June 9, 1930, for Columbia. Razaf joined forces once more with his cowriter of 1929, Paul Denniker, on "Back Where We Started." But his freshest and most compelling collaborations—aside from his work with Waller—were with Alex Hill and James P. Johnson. With Jimmy Johnson (as he was often credited on phonograph records), Razaf authored "A Porter's Love Song" and "Go Harlem," both recorded by Johnson's band for Columbia on March 25, 1931. Razaf sang on these selections as well as on "Good for Nothin'," "Kitchen Mechanic's Parade," "Bantu Baby," "On the Level," and "Slippy Hips." Their "Shake Your Duster" evolved to become Alex Hill's "Shake Your Ashes" (1932) and five years later Razaf with Denniker's "Shake Your Can," at least as far as titles went. What contemporary black listeners thought of such songs as "Mammy Land" or even "Sambo's Syncopated Russian Dance" remains undocumented.

With Alex Hill, Razaf turned out "A Glutton for Love," "Lumber Jack," "My Only One," and "Papa Ain't No Santa Claus." In collaboration with Don

Redman and Howdy Quicksell, Razaf wrote "The Way I Feel" and he and Spencer Williams coauthored "My Man o' War," for which Davis secured another Victor session for vaudeville blues singer Lizzie Miles. A second title recorded at the session, "Electrician Blues," included another Razaf tune, which Joe Davis bought two years later. The pianist, Harry Brooks, cowrote "Just Sociable" with Razaf, which Davis published in 1930. Just as he did from the beginning of his career, Davis remembered his friends, even in the Depression.

Alexander Hill became the other major writer to come into the Davis sphere at this time. A talented pianist and arranger, Hill had his own band as early as 1924. With a background that included extensive touring, working on films in Hollywood, and playing in Chicago in Jimmy Noone's band, Hill found himself working with Sammy Stewart's outfit at the Savoy in New York in the spring of 1930. Davis published Hill's work throughout the 1930s, although he spent part of the decade as a staff arranger with Irving Mills.

During this productive period in 1930 he wrote many tunes in collaboration with Fats Waller, such as "Be Modern," "Tallahassee," "Thanks to You," "The One That I Was Born to Love," and "Keep a Song in Your Soul," his first published tune. He also wrote the excellent "Draggin' My Heart Around," which Waller was to record in 1931. Other tunes he published in 1930 included "Quality Shout," which he had arranged for Paul Howard's Quality Serenaders (a hot band featuring Lawrence Brown on trombone and Lionel Hampton on drums) for a Victor session in Hollywood in 1929. His "Heart of Stone," written with Fats Waller, turned up years later on a Una Mae Carlisle session. Fragments of two tunes, "A Cooking Lesson" and "You Had Too Much," both apparently unpublished, remained in Davis's files.

Unfortunately, a "novelty song" titled "When Hannah Plays Piano" was published with these memorable lines:

The way she renders a tune will always linger,  
She's got the strength of a horse in every finger;  
To keep from saying rotten,  
Just stuff your ears with cotton.

His "(You Were Only) Passing Time with Me" is prettier, less mawkish, and thoughtfully printed with a ukulele arrangement by May Singhi Breen. In September King Oliver's Band recorded it for Victor and a month later Alex Hill accompanied Art Gillham's vocal version for Columbia on piano.

## ASCAP

Davis's involvement with black writers and performers began early in his career and continued until the end. Not surprisingly, his memorabilia contained a newspaper cutting with a suggested slight by ASCAP of its black composers, who at that time included W. C. Handy, Clarence Williams, Fats Waller, Maceo Pinkard, Perry Bradford, and Andy Razaf, as well as "serious" composers like Harry T. Burleigh and J. Rosamund Johnson. Black ASCAP members were not invited to a stag outing at Montauk Point on Long Island on the evening of September 10, 1930, although afterward ASCAP maintained that the hotel there would not accept colored people. "I'm surprised to hear there is some objection," Gene Buck, head of ASCAP, was quoted in the *Daily News* for September 16, 1930. Davis almost certainly retained the cutting because the racist overtones of the event rankled him.

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers began February 13, 1914, in New York City. According to its mission statement, the organization's "primary purpose is to assure that music creators are fairly compensated for the public performance of their works, and that their rights are properly protected." Writers joined ASCAP because it was a trade association but also as a means to protect their work. From the outset ASCAP embraced all comers; within the first decade its membership included Irving Berlin, James Weldon Johnson, Jerome Kern, and John Philip Sousa.

In addition to work by Andy Razaf, Spencer Williams, and Fats Waller (all ASCAP members) and Alex Hill, Davis added Triangle or Georgia Music titles by Luis Russell, such as "Doctor Blues" (with Paul Barbarin); "Higginbotham Blues" (with J. C. Higginbotham); "Song of the Swanee," "Louisiana Swing," and "Saratoga Shout" (with Charlie Holmes); and "Savoy Shout" (with Louis Metcalfe). These selections comprise some of the most memorable jazz cut during the early Depression era. The May 29, 1930, session included "Louisiana Swing," which featured an unknown vocalist that pianist Walter Pichon thought was Paul Barbarin, who cowrote (along with trumpeter Henry Allen) "Poor Lil Me," one of the other two titles cut at the time. J. C. Higginbotham, however, thought the singer had been Andy Razaf, who had written the third title, "On Revival Day." Joe Davis, not surprisingly, published all three tunes.

Other interesting tunes also appeared among the 1930 publications, including those of the enigmatic white trumpeter Jack Purvis. His



remarkable solos on "Copyin' Louis" and "Mental Strain at Dawn," in particular, are noteworthy, so it's not surprising that Davis should wish to publish them. The oddly titled "Mental Strain at Dawn" apparently never bothered Davis, who was always more interested in content, and in a way this perhaps helped pave the way for some of the peculiar Reginald Foresythe titles from later in the decade that Davis picked up.

The appearance of very old songs whose copyrights had either run out or whose melodies allowed themselves to be "arranged" increasingly found their way into Davis's stable of publishing companies. E. Platzman arranged "Auld Lang Syne" and E. V. Body became writer of "Ain't Gonna Rain No More," "Frankie and Johnnie," "Birmingham Jail," and "Willie the Weeper." Spencer Williams earned the credit for "She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain" and Polk Brockman for "Sittin' on Top of the World," presumably on the strength of serving as the A&R man on the Mississippi Sheiks' OKeh session of February 17, 1930. Eugene Platzman was concerned not only with arrangements of older tunes but he was also chipping in with his own new efforts; with Spencer Williams he came up with "Hawaiian Lullaby." Perhaps the sands and waters of Waikiki called even more strongly during this difficult period. Ever vigilant regarding trends in the music industry, Davis continued publishing folios of songs, all of which would thus be copyrighted.

In May 1930, Davis surprised the music business. *Talking Machine & Radio Weekly* reported: "Effective May 1, the Triangle Music Pub. Co., Inc., will be known as Joe Davis, Inc. . . . The former company will pass from existence entirely with its entire catalog to be issued under the Joe Davis trade-mark." *Zit's Theatrical World* for October 25 outlined the event in detail:

During the recent depths of depression in [the] music publishing business when selling hits were as scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth, Joe Davis, who recently took over the ownership of the Triangle Music Co. with which he was identified for years, acquired a ballad fox trot, "You Were Only Passing Time With Me," words and music by his new discovery, Alexander Hill. Joe went hook, line and sinker for this tune, making it the plug number for his catalog . . . Joe still continues to plug and has nosed his tune in among the ten best sellers.

Despite the efforts put into pushing these new songs, Davis still found time somehow to continue to sing and play on the air. In the October 6,



1930, edition of the *Daily Mirror*, columnist Nick Kenny reported royally that “we have just discovered that a voice *we* like very much on the air belongs to Joe Davis, the music publisher. He sings other publishers’ songs as well as his own.” The next section in the paper stated that Phil Napoleon, ex-Original Memphis Five trumpeter, currently worked as the director of programs on WEA and WJZ. Perhaps this was when Davis came to know Napoleon well, for he was to record him quite extensively in the 1940s both under his own name and as a member of the band of Frank Signorelli, the former pianist with the Original Memphis Five.

Until the mid-1930s determining the sales of particular songs remained problematic because Davis only began to keep specific details about record sales when he was a record manufacturer in the 1940s and when it was required by the American Federation of Musicians. Nonetheless, a fascinating 1930 Rudy Vallee royalty statement notes that as of June 30 he was paid \$530.24 and as of December 31, 1930, he received \$1,507.74, which included payment on 83,360 sheet music copies of “S’posin” sold. The advent successively of the phonograph and the radio effectively brought about the end of sheet music sales as a major force. Davis, however, demonstrated he could still make money from what many considered to be an increasingly outmoded medium, particularly through sales in older, traditional styles.

Until late in 1930 Fats Waller lived in Chicago and upon his return to a dispirited New York scene, had immediately gone to see Joe Davis. Maurice Waller recalled that “Joe Davis began discussing ‘marketability,’ and tried to explain that being a fine pianist wasn’t necessarily sufficient to guarantee recording contracts. Joe reminded Pop of the days when he used to go around with Andy trying to sell their material to publishers. Why not sing the material on record?” (Maurice Waller and Anthony Calabrese, *Fats Waller* [London: Cassall, 1978], 89).

Waller felt that his voice was not good enough to sing but Davis persevered. Maurice Waller suggested that “radio, rather than managerial advice, turned Fats Waller into a singer” (Ibid.). Perhaps, but it’s more complicated than the power of radio. Early in November 1930, CBS planned a show with Paramount called “Paramount on Parade” and Maurice Waller states that “some executives remembered the organist who had filled in for Jesse Crawford and they asked Dad to play the show. He readily accepted and the series began on December 8, 1930. Unable to mug to a radio audience, Pop began to sing” (Ibid., 90). The radio show ran for its thirteen weeks and subsequently renewed for a further thirteen.

In fairness to Joe Davis, Waller had been making records for more than eight years under his own name and he had never seen the need to sing till the end of 1930. By his own admission, Waller did not think he had a good enough voice. Despite the show's obvious success (it quickly gained a thirteen-week renewal), for several months no one clamored for Waller to record a vocal/piano session. The rotund pianist didn't get a solo session until March 13, 1931, when he cut "I'm Draggin' My Heart Around" and "I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby," the former an Alex Hill composition, the latter a magnificent Alex Hill collaboration, and sang on both. That session also benefited Davis, who published both songs.

Maurice Waller noted that after the success of the "Paramount on Parade" radio show:

Joe Davis now had a lever to push his client as a vocalist as well as pianist. He approached Victor for a recording date, but they weren't interested in a singing Fats Waller. [When Victor did record him in 1934, he sang on every track except one instrumental in his first four sessions. A number of those tunes were Joe Davis publications.] Davis persuaded Frank Walker . . . to listen to the new Fats. Walker liked what he heard and looked around for a session. (Ibid.)

Ironically a Ted Lewis (who simply loved to sing when he wasn't playing clarinet) session was chosen for Waller's vocal debut on Columbia. Lewis zealously guarded his vocal spots and really only Ruth Etting and Sophie Tucker managed to squeeze in a song on previous sessions, but that had been nearly five years before when both were at their peak. Frank Walker must have had quite a way with him to persuade Lewis to allow an "unknown"—and black—vocalist to record with him. Some compromise certainly occurred for the first recorded title, on March 5, 1931, has a Ted Lewis vocal. The session's other title was "I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby" and features Waller's first vocal as such on record. The likes of Muggsy Spanier, Benny Goodman, and George Brunies tucked away in the Lewis band must have been thrilled. The next day they were back to cut another Davis tune, "Dallas Blues," plus "Royal Garden Blues." Walker was quite satisfied that the Davis hunch had paid off, for Waller sang on both. As his son delicately remarked, "never one to be upstaged, Lewis walked over to the microphone, and right in the middle of Dad's 'Royal Garden Blues' piano solo, the bandleader shouted 'Is everybody happy?'" (Ibid., 96).

In fact the interjection took place on the first-recorded tune of the day, “Dallas Blues,” which is truly an original Waller number. Lewis’s interjection is even more pointed than Maurice Waller recalled. Lewis says, “Play it, boy, play it. (Pause). Ahhhh. (Pause). Everybody happy? Yes, sir.” This utterance slices right across the bulk of the second part of the piano solo, though in fairness to Lewis it is delivered much as western swing pioneer Bob Wills would have done to one of his soloists. He also speaks it fairly softly rather than shouts the words. Nonetheless, Lewis clearly felt the track had become Fats Waller’s and not his.

Whether or not it upset Frank Walker is not known, but Columbia issued the third take—though Lewis often ran to three or more—and Walker probably felt prepared to turn a deaf ear to Lewis’s aside. One wonders what Waller felt about this somewhat uneasy collaboration. A week later Waller recorded as a singer/pianist for Columbia, remaking one of the titles he just cut for the company. By the time that Waller signed up for “Radio Roundup” his son later wrote that “Davis was satisfied that Fats Waller was marketable as a pianist and vocalist”(Ibid.).

Davis’s role in the emergence of Fats Waller as a national figure appears more significant than the rather passive role afforded him to date. In the years before Maurice Waller’s book appeared, Davis took great pride in claiming to be the person responsible for Waller first appearing as a vocalist. Perhaps the presence of “radio, rather than managerial advice” produced the singer in Fats Waller, but radio alone did not bring it about. Commercial radio began in 1920 and Fats had been making music for unseen audiences for even longer.

Within a short time of Davis assessing Waller in different marketing terms—after all, he’d tried pianist, session pianist, writer, and composer—Fats Waller emerged as a singer and raconteur. In his highly respected book about Waller, Joel Vance stated that “Davis advised Waller to do as much singing as possible on the radio programs, since he wanted to advance Waller’s value as an entertainer (and, simultaneously, as a plugger of Davis-owned material)” (Joel Vance, *Fats Waller: His Life and Times* [Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1977], 81).

Apart from the Waller connection, 1931 proved a pretty thin year for Davis as it was for so many others. Extremely few record sessions took place and even Waller didn’t return to the studio again until 1934. King Oliver’s band recorded “I’m Crazy ’Bout My Baby” for Brunswick in February, using an Alex Hill arrangement, apparently as a last-minute substitute for “That’s the Kind of Man for Me,” another Davis publication written

by Andy Razaf and Jack Palmer (Walter Allen and Brian Rust, revised by Laurie Wright, *"King" Oliver* [Chigwell, Essex, England: Storyville Publications, 1987], 141).

Waller continued writing songs for Davis. Early in January 1931 he added "How Can You Face Me" and "Wait and See" along with "Heart of Stone," coauthored with Alex Hill. Within a few months he added "Washboard Ballet" and "African Ripples" to "I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby," but other additions to Davis's catalogue were fewer than usual and rarely as interesting.

True, Luis Russell chipped in with "Muggin' Lightly," Alex Hill added "I Wish I Had Someone to Call Me Baby," while Razaf and J. C. Johnson wrote "Dip Your Brush in the Sunshine" (which Ted Lewis recorded). Around the same time Gene Gifford contributed "Casa Loma Stomp," which proved quite popular in the swing era, while Red Nichols and Ted Weems added the delightfully titled "Get Cannibal." All of these selections eventually appeared in the repertoires of pop- and jazz-oriented bands throughout the country.

Davis even tried "My Home in Oklahoma," as one of a variety of "State" songs, which began to catch his imagination more than ever in the upcoming years. But the likes of "Little Rosewood Casket" (credited to Spencer Williams—Joe Davis, but first published shortly after the close of the Civil War and initially recorded by Ernest Thompson in 1924) probably paid the bills. Many other credits to questionable chestnuts bore the name of the ever-elusive E. V. Body. Davis publications boldly (and perhaps cynically) credited Body with the authorship of "Bar'bra Allen," "Lonesome Road," and "Can I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight." All of them had been in oral circulation for many years; "Bar'bra Allen" was first published in England in the mid-eighteenth century!

Davis's early link with blues artists was now quite tenuous, though he continued to maintain contact with Lonnie Johnson, who managed to record quite regularly for Columbia and Okeh during 1930–1932. Davis published a few of his recorded tunes like "She's Making Whopee [*sic*] in Hell Tonight" and "She Don't Know Who She Wants" and copyrighted others that weren't recorded, such as "Friends Cause Me to Be Out on the Street." As so often occurs in Davis's files, these songs appeared not only as lead sheets but also in the writer's own hand. In Johnson's case, he wrote the lyrics in his own hand on his own notepaper, headed "Lonnie Johnson Recording Artist, Okeh, New York City."

Fats Waller spent much of the summer of 1931 in Europe and when he got back he did cut a few sides in an October session fronted by Jack

Teagarden. He also sought out Joe Davis, who gave him back his old job and found him a manager, Marty Bloom. For several months Fats was settled with steady work and a regular income. Hardly surprisingly, Bloom soon discovered that the task was no easy one and handed Fats over to a friend, Phil Ponce, who proved a good fit with Waller.

New York's Connie's Inn had closed and Ponce found Waller a broadcast outlet over station WLW Cincinnati, which enjoyed very wide coverage that stretched nearly nationwide. In Cincinnati he ran across a young woman, Una Mae Carlisle, who was of mixed African American and Native American ancestry, and both played piano and sang. Carlisle, then largely unknown, would later crop up in the futures of both Waller and Joe Davis.

Several very artistically successful sessions took place in April and May of 1932 in New York, under the nominal leadership of vocalist Billy Banks. Eddie Condon put another group together including Henry Allen, Pee Wee Russell, Pops Foster, and Zutty Singleton, this time topped off by Waller on piano. The second title on the session, "Mean Old Bed Bug Blues," was thought for years to feature the vocal of the Waller protégé Una Mae Carlisle, but the "female" voice is by Banks himself, quite a well-known female impersonator. "Mean Old Bed Bug Blues," a Joe Davis title of long standing, and Brunswick's request for a license from Davis to release it was signed by Jack Kapp, who would soon leave to found Decca Records.

Waller's WLW contract was extended, effectively removing him from Davis's direct influence. Genuinely glad to see Waller move his career along, if Davis also gained some from that, he can hardly be blamed. He was, after all, responsible on those two occasions for giving Waller a secure base from which to work, and Fats repaid him with popular songs to publish.

Waller remained an important figure to Davis throughout the pianist's remaining short life and it came as no surprise to find newspaper cuttings of Waller's death in Davis's files. He kept no other such clippings in his files. Similarly Davis kept in close contact with the pianist's final manager, ex-California Ramblers boss, Ed Kirkeby, well after Waller's death.

During 1932 Davis's regular writers remained hard at work. Razaf teamed up again with Fats Waller for "How Can You Face Me," "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now," and "Radio Papa Broadcasting Mama." Razaf was particularly busy, composing "Electrician Blues" and "Keep Your Nose Out of Mama's Business." He also collaborated with others; with Spencer Williams he wrote "I'm a Stationary Woman"; with J. C. Johnson, "What's Your Price"; with Joe Davis, "Glory"; and with Alex Hill, "Children Walk

with Me.” Hill turned in little else apart from a “Kentucky Lullaby”—not quite a new state for Davis to sell—with Nat Brusiloff and Arthur Ray as an unlikely trio of writers. Pianists Claude Hopkins, Porter Grainger, Luis Russell, and J. C. Johnson furnished tunes, as did Don Redman and Red Nichols (“Junk Man’s Blues”). One of the more unusual new arrivals was part-writer of “Take Your Time,” one Quinto, which Davis’s files kindly inform was none other than Bing Crosby.

Not all of the material Davis published in 1932 was aimed at the contemporary jazz, blues, or pop market. Arranger Ben Garrison stayed busy working on such nineteenth-century Negro spirituals as “Little David Play On Your Harp,” “Go Down Moses,” “Give Me That Old Time Religion,” and “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” for a folio. Henri Klickmann arranged some of Stephen Foster’s songbook, with “Louisiana Belle” being one of the first aboard. Again, Davis looked toward the folio market for Klickmann’s arrangements.

Davis and other publishers believed that songs situated in a specific state helped to boost sales. Sometimes they appealed to former residents who had moved elsewhere; other songs appealed to current residents of a particular state. Many of these songs, interestingly, focused on southern states. Tin Pan Alley was littered with assorted Carolina and Georgia melodies, in particular, during the 1920s and 1930s. Triangle Music and its allied companies—such as Georgia Music—helped to lead the way. Davis clearly followed this mantra for his publications included “Carolina Blues” (1922), “Carolina Stomp” (1925), and “Carolina Smiles” (1929). Perhaps 1932’s “Kentucky Lullaby” sold well enough to inspire “Carolina Lullaby” one year later. In the following two years Davis published “Carolina Cabin Home” and “Carolina Lou.” He offered “Georgia Gigolo” the same year as Georgia Music was launched (1929), which kicked off a series of “Georgia” titles including “Georgia Bound” (1932), “Georgia May” (1934), and “Georgia Rockin’ Chair” (1935). Its clearly not coincidence that one of Davis’s pseudonyms was Georgia South.

During the 1920s and 1930s Davis’s various writers not only honored most of the states of mainland America, but also turned their attention to Hawaii. In 1935 alone Hawaii was saturated with “Hawaiian Kisses” and “Chimes of Honolulu” (by Spencer Williams, the former under the pseudonym Goudon), “Hawaiian Star-Light” and “In My Dream of Waikiki” (both by Paul Denniker), plus Marvin Smolev’s “Neath Hawaiian Skies” and Billy Heagney’s “Somebody’s Lonely in Hawaii.” It is difficult to imagine that anyone can have been lonely there with all this attention.

Davis, however, didn't neglect states located outside of the South: as a further sampling, "Colorado Blues" (1935), "Arizona Blues" (1929), "Dakota Land" (1935), and even a "Nebraska Moon," to say nothing of "In the Snow-Capped Hills of Wyoming" (1937). Even Zez Confrey got into the act with "Mighty Lackawanna," albeit not a state but a song about an important river in northeastern Pennsylvania. Many cowboy territory tunes were credited to Harry Lowe, the "Roaming Ranger"—usually just credited to Ranger, which is yet another Joe Davis pseudonym. An old cowboy song "Sam Bass" (first printed in 1890) came aboard in 1935 credited to Ranger-Davis; both being Joe Davis!

One major event in 1932 for Davis was his nomination for member of ASCAP as "composer and author." ASCAP received his application at 11:30 A.M. on July 19 and the "List of Works" stated on the back of the application form ran from 1916 publications like "Down Where the Old Road Turns" (written with Arthur C. Melvin) to the current "Glory" (with Razaf) and "Hills of Tennessee (Are Calling Me)" with Spencer Williams. Interestingly, Davis later added the 1933 "He's a Son of the South," on which he collaborated with Razaf and Reginald Foresythe. The application for Davis's membership was proposed by Spencer Williams and seconded by Thomas Waller!

Davis later assisted others into ASCAP, including Eugene Gifford, who joined on the strength of "Casa Loma Stomp." The Chicago publisher Milton Weil wrote Davis an undated letter in which he said: "I am very much interested in selling my entire catalogue also in membership in Ascap if you can swing a Deal for me I would be glad to give you a Percentage it must be cash . . . P.S. Please. Keep this confidential as much as possible." It seems that Weil intended considerable confidentiality, as he almost certainly typed this himself.

January 1933 heralded yet another difficult year, one of the worst of the Depression. The year started quite well with Davis who earned an advance on January 7 of \$500.00 from ASCAP against future royalties. Nonetheless, Joe Davis added compositions from trusted writers, although there were fewer than for many years. Alex Hill was particularly busy for Davis with "Tennessee Twilight," "The Eel" (possibly best known from the 1939 Bud Freeman session), "Home Cookin'," "I'm Pinching Myself," and "Mme Dynamite." Hill's "Dixie Lee" fitted among assorted "Dixie" titles from Spencer Williams's 1928 "Dixie Shadows" to Vernon Dalhart's "Dixie Joe" of 1937.

An interesting addition to the writers was Reginald Foresythe, son of a West African barrister, with whom Davis remained in contact into the



1950s. Foresythe's "Deep Forest," cowritten with Earl Hines, became the first of Foresythe's songs to be published. Andy Razaf wrote words to the tune, subtitled, "A Hymn to Darkness." Foresythe developed a penchant for peculiar titles, such as "Garden of Weed," "Dodging a Divorcee," and "Revolt of the Yes-Men," although those of 1933 for Davis were straightforward enough. With Razaf and Ted Weems he wrote "Be Ready," and with Razaf he created "Mississippi Basin," which Clarence Williams saw fit to record during a June 1933 session. Another Razaf collaboration was "Please Don't Talk about My Man," which, in light of Foresythe's personal inclinations, did not specifically refer to a female singer. Perhaps best known that year for an effort with Razaf and Paul Denniker entitled "He's a Son of the South," Foresyth recorded it for Decca in England in May 1933 as a piano solo but, together with the fascinatingly titled "Serenade for a Wealthy Widow," it was never issued. The latter was recorded as a band version in England by Lew Stone and in the United States by Hal Kemp.

Almost to the day that Reginald Foresythe stepped into a London studio, the violin-led orchestra of Eddie South cut another Joe Davis tune (Paul Denniker's "No More Blues") at Victor's studios in Chicago. Among the personnel were two men—guitarist Everett Barksdale and bass player Milton Hinton, Davis's firm favorite—both of whom would frequent Davis sessions in the 1950s. Davis's sheet music carried a picture of Ted Lewis with the caption "successfully featured by Ted Lewis and His Band Exclusive Columbia Record Artists."

Despite having given this huge plug to both, Lewis never recorded "No More Blues" for Columbia. However, it is quite clear that the earlier Waller session with Lewis brought the bandleader and the publisher/A&R man together, possibly for the first time. Significantly, Lewis recorded Davis's "Dip Your Brush in the Sunshine" at his very next session.

In August Davis wrote to ASCAP reminding them that "Lullaby Lady (From Lullaby Lane)" was vocalist Ethel Shutta's theme song with George Olsen's Orchestra on the NBC network and "Call of the Freaks," Luis Russell's signature tune from the Roseland, broadcast by CBS, were his publications. *The Billboard* for September 16, 1933, carried among its "New Song Tips," Davis's "Moonlight Down in Lovers' Lane."

Davis could not have written a more eulogistic piece if he had tried. It had, the reviewer stated, "a pervading true stamp of commercialism about it. Also an infectious catchiness in the tune . . . a sidewalk obsession, with its reminiscent strains an incentive and eventual lure for substantial counter sales." The review further observed that "even folks endowed with little



or no analytical musical gifts will not experience much hardship in tracing its transparent sources," but the likes of composers Bartley Costello and Max Kortlander would have been in the music business long enough to be able to distinguish between plagiarism and similarity—at least as far as copyright law went.

A full catalogue of "Joe Davis" publications for 1933 included a wide variety of available paperwork. Sheet music sold for 35 cents, piano solos for 40 cents, trumpet and saxophone solos for 50 cents, and brass band arrangements for 75 cents. The catalogue also listed "baby specials," orchestrations to fit any small band from four to seven pieces, with arrangements by Dave Kaplan, Ken Macomber, and Harry Ferguson. Standard dance orchestrations cost 75 cents, so this less expensive line almost certainly appealed to downsized bands woodshedding during the Depression.

For 50 cents one could buy any of seven folios "of real distinction." They comprised a sixty-eight-page minstrel booklet, complete with end-men jokes and music, fifty Hawaiian songs, twenty "Hill Country Songs & Ballads," a Carson Robison collection of "hill country" songs, fifty "favorite Negro Spirituals" and ten modern spirituals labeled as "Paul Whiteman's 'favorites' featuring Mildred Bailey." The final folio in the list pointed to the future; ten titles under the heading "Songs My Father Taught Me (Not to Sing)." "If you like spice," it said, "this folio will make you chuckle with joy—smile when you're blue and perhaps make you blush a little—?" It included titles such as "My Handy Man," "My Man o' War" (a topical nod to the wildly successful race horse), "Keep Your Nose Out of Mama's Business," "I'm Wild about That Thing," and "Electrician Blues."

Whether or not the facts are related, after 1930 Davis did not maintain a scrapbook of his press cuttings again until the early 1940s, when he turned to record manufacturing. Perhaps the tight times of the Depression directly reflected the mileage he received in the trade press; certainly many of those trade papers that helped him in the 1920s had died by the early 1930s. By the mid-1930s the number of new titles published suggest that Davis's business was slowly picking up. By the later 1930s the recording scene began to flourish once more, which kept him heavily involved in placement of material. The year 1934, however, seems to mark the bottom of the market.

A listing for 1934 of copyright arrangements for non-copyright music of the seventy-two compositions played one thousand times (presumably airplay compilations from ASCAP) provides an interesting sidelight on publishing activities. Davis had been dipping his toe in this water since

1929, but he remained way behind Carl Fischer, which published forty-five out of these seventy-two tunes. The one Davis entry—there were only four between Fischer and Davis—was for his version of “Red River Valley,” available only as 35-cent sheet music. However, it earned the number-six spot and several other titles for which Davis had copyrighted arrangements—“Blue Danube Waltz” and “Auld Lang Syne”—appeared in the top twenty. To place this listing in greater perspective, the seventy-two leading plays totaled 126,245 performances but the 5,865 non-copyrighted titles received a total of 667,129 performances. These selections very clearly formed a most important adjunct to Davis’s music publishing.

Despite the Depression, the great songwriters remained busy, often in creative ways. Fats Waller’s 1929 “Chinaman’s Breakdown,” which first appeared as “Meditation” in 1927, was eventually re-copyrighted as “Effer-vescent.” The tune appeared as “Meditation” in a folio of “Joe Davis Novelty Piano Solos” published in 1934, highlighted by Waller’s “Viper’s Drag.” Most ardent jazz collectors wouldn’t consider it to be a “novelty” piece, but then Davis always considered sales to the general public. The folio’s back cover offered his “Entertainment And Minstrel Folio,” that included “\$1,000,000 worth of fun! for 500 with 30 songs and 68 pages of laughter and merriment.” He shrewdly added “suitable for home entertainment professional and amateur shows,” underscoring his ongoing interest in show business. Long after most publishers downplayed the genre, Davis remained fascinated with minstrel material, possibly partly because of his friendship with Al Bernard, not to mention Chris Smith and Eddie Green, and he recorded minstrel show material well into the 1940s.

Doubtless in order to save something on artwork costs, Davis also published the sheet music to Jimmy (James P.) Johnson’s “High Brown” using the identical plates—apart from the title and the colors—as for Waller’s “Viper’s Drag.” Alex Hill came in with “Delta Bound” and Art Gillham submitted titles as he had done every year. Gillham’s Columbia contract ran out in 1931 and he recorded just one coupling for Bluebird on March 31, 1934, recorded in San Antonio, Texas. Gillham included a Davis-published tune, “I’d Rather Be Alone,” coauthored by Billy Smythe, who also played piano for the session.

Interestingly, Gillham recorded only three days before Santa Fe, Texas, blues pianist Rob Cooper recorded with vocalist Joe Pullum. Having been “Barrelhouse Pete” in Columbia’s race series in 1928, Gillham would surely have been interested in the local musical activity. One of his Columbia selections, “Pussy,” makes one wonder if he might not rather have been at

the Mississippi Sheiks' session five days before his own when they cut the likes of "Pencil Won't Write No More."

During the same period veteran ragtime pianist Pete Wendling chipped in with "Old Nebraska Moon," while Herman Chittison added "Swampy Ground" to the Davis stable. Another old-time pianist, J. Russel Robinson (as Joe Hoover), wrote a contemporary ballad, "Clyde Barrow & Bonnie Parker," about the outlaw-lovers who robbed banks in Texas and Oklahoma. Writing as John Paul Jones, Davis himself added "I'm a Very Highly Educated Man," sounding very Gilbert and Sullivan, and "Mrs. Jimmie Rodgers Lament," as by Richard Kuster.

The latter contained a clause to make "50% Victor Mechanicals payable to Southern Music for Mrs. Jimmie Rodgers." Doubtless it suited Davis to wear different caps when he ventured into different musical fields. In the 1950s and 1960s, Louisiana songwriter and record producer J. D. Miller used his real name for white, country songs and the name of J. West for black material. He explained that local and regional DJs knew his name well enough that each would be unlikely to play the others' type of material. Such racial divides slowly melted away beginning in the mid-1960s when Motown helped to further integrate the airwaves.

Joe Davis remained proud of having been the first to publish a young writer's work, such as Frank Weldon, who wrote many 1930s and 1940s popular songs. Along with lyricist James Cavanaugh, he part-wrote "Breakin' the Ice" in 1934, though he'd written "I Like Mountain Music" the previous year, but not for Davis. Just the same, "Breakin' the Ice" proved sufficiently successful that Fats Waller recorded it for Victor on November 7, 1934—the only Davis title recorded that day.

The Depression bottomed out in 1934 and was a thin time for Andy Razaf, but his "I Never Slept a Wink Last Night," with music by Nat Simon, was clearly one song that Davis pushed. The sheet music sported a fetching photograph of Frances Langford, who "featured" the tune. Then Davis sent out a self-drawn cartoon postcard of the song, showing a man pacing up and down in his bedroom holding his girl's photograph, who doesn't look as attractive as Miss Langford.

During 1934 Phil Ponce, Fats Waller's manager, decided to launch Fats as a bandleader and negotiated a new Victor recording contract for his client. The band now included three members who remained for a long time with Fats: trumpeter Herman Autrey, drummer Harry Dial, and a young guitarist, Al Casey, whom Fats had met when broadcasting over WLW in Cincinnati. Reedman Gene Sedric joined the group on the second Victor

session in August 1934, and both he and Casey remained with Fats until his last Victor session with his regular band in July 1942. The first title recorded by Fats at the initial May 1934 Victor session of "Fats Waller and His Rhythm" was a Davis song, the Razaf-Johnson composition "A Porter's Love Song to a Chambermaid." The next session commenced with Razaf-Denniker's "Georgia May," which Davis also published.

Joe Davis clearly kept close contact with Waller and his recording material and on November 16, 1934, he certainly came up trumps. Waller recorded the first unaccompanied piano solos since "Smashing Thirds" in September 1929, and all four—"African Ripples," "Clothes Line Ballet," "Alligator Crawl," and "Viper's Drag"—were Davis-published tunes, are considered classic performances, and have been reissued many times. Four out of five titles—the other being "Effervescent"—were featured in a 60-cent Davis folio of "Fats Waller's Piano Pranks." It's unclear why the 1927 tune "Meditation" earned a re-copyright. It hardly fitted next to "African Ripples" or "Viper's Drag" under its old title as a "prank," but "Effervescent" fits reasonably enough.

### Back to the Blues

The middle of the decade marked a distinct upswing in the recording business's vitality. Circumstances forced Davis to all but ignore the race market since 1931, but as it happened, 1935 also saw a considerable upsurge in blues recordings. The total number of race blues sides selections dropped precipitously to a mere twenty-four in 1932. During 1933 and 1934 the total blues recordings had crept back above the dismal level of sixty-eight in 1931 but nonetheless remained below one hundred each year. Some two hundred blues titles were recorded in 1935, however, and the companies began to look afresh at new artists. Davis sensed that the race industry was picking up and he jumped aboard the wagon when it surged upward during the fall of 1935.

As early as February 25, 1935, he picked up the copyright on "Providence Help The Poor People," an uncompromisingly tough blues by a newcomer at his first session, known later as Big Joe Williams. Davis clearly liked varied material as he also purchased "Somebody's Been Borrowing That Stuff," which Williams recorded at the same session. How Davis came to be thus involved is not known, but throughout 1935, to say nothing of later years in the 1930s, he gained the copyrights to many fine blues.

The Victor connection possibly came in the shape of Eli Oberstein. Some corroboration of this theory comes from the session sheets for the Sparks Brothers sessions of July 28, 1935. All eight titles are credited to Georgia Music, one of Davis's publishing houses, and Oberstein presided as the A&R man, having taken over from Ralph Peer. All titles for the Sparks Brother previous session were credited to Southern Music, a company overseen by Peer. The presence of guitarist Henry Townsend provides another link between the Joe Williams session and those of the Sparks Brothers. It doesn't explain, however, the direct connection with other Bluebird sessions like Joe Williams's second with "Wild Cow Blues" and Tampa Red's of June 14, 1935, with "Mean Mistreater Blues," both of which—and possibly others from similar sessions—were Davis registered.

An interesting title recorded at the same time as the Sparks Brothers' July 1935 session was Lane Hardin's "California Desert Blues," which turned up among Davis's regularly printed sheets of copyrighted material simply as "The Desert Blues." The credit of L. Hardin actually masked a Davis pseudonym. Record collectors and blues enthusiasts have long speculated on the true name of Lane Hardin, but the fact that Davis used this name as a pseudonym might resurrect the theory that Hardin was itself a pseudonym masking an unknown performer. If nothing else, Davis certainly chose to copyright some of the finest blues recorded in 1935. (A detailed article about Lane Hardin is Tony Russell, "Searching the Desert for the Blues: Locating Lane Hardin," *Blues & Rhythm* 261 [2011]: 21–25.)

Louis Armstrong's wife, Lil, was born Lillian Hardin. She worked and studied in New York City in the 1920s and parted from Louis in 1931. Later, in 1939, after she was divorced from Louis, Joe Davis came into contact with her. A metal-based two-sided piano/vocal recording of her made on April 26, 1940, at the Chappie Willet Recording Studios on West 44th Street in New York City was among Davis's effects. It is just possible that L. Hardin is her rather than Lane Hardin.

Although Davis nudged his way back into the race market, he nonetheless strongly continued along his more traditional lines in publishing. He had lost Waller now as a writer for the most part, although with Andy Razaf, Waller wrote "Find Out What They Like." Davis welcomed a few new titles from Alex Hill, such as "Baby Brown," which Waller recorded at his first 1935 session, and "Song Of The Plough," recorded by Hill for Vocalion in October with his Hollywood Sepians. Andy Razaf continued writing songs that Davis used many years later, such as "Mama's Well Has Done Gone Dry," and—with Alex Hill—"If I Can't Sell It" and "My Right

Hand Man,” the latter for his folio of naughty songs. With assistance from Davis and Paul Denniker, Razaf came up with one tune that did well in the race market, “If You Can’t Take Five Take Two.” Interestingly, the Bluebird recording by western swing star Milton Brown and his Musical Brownies probably enjoyed the greatest number of sales.

### Breaking New Ground

Newer composers like Gene Gifford dreamed up “Squareface,” “Dizzy Glide,” “Nothing But The Blues,” “New Orleans Twist,” and “The Cobra And The Flute.” The first four of these were recorded at his Victor session in May, with an excellent line-up including Bunny Berigan, Bud Freeman, and Wingy Manone. Reginald Foresythe produced “Southern Holiday,” billed as “A Phantasy of Negro Moods,” which was introduced by Paul Whiteman at the Biltmore Hotel in New York. Although Whiteman recorded many Foresythe compositions, including “Deep Forest,” he never recorded “Southern Holiday.”

Without doubt the most important acquisition of 1935 was Earl Hines’s “Rosetta.” Different printings of the sheet music—same format, different photographs—featured Jan Garber, star of “The Yeastfoam Program,” and Rudy Vallee. Davis included it as one of fifteen featured songs in his “Piano Modes of Foremost Modern Pianists” folio. In a foreword to this most enterprising collection, Davis states that, “in my estimation, [this] is the CREAM of my catalogue and the piano transcriptions were interpreted and arranged by the Artists identified with each particular selection.”

Thus certain composers, such as Ferde Grofe with “Suez,” Claude Hopkins with “I Would Do Anything for You,” as well as Fats Waller’s “I’m Crazy ’Bout My Baby,” reinterpreted their original scores, which are set side-by-side with their originals in this brave and new venture. Davis lined up a veritable galaxy of important men to rearrange other titles—Victor Arden tackles “Sweethearts On Parade,” Roy Bargy reworked “After You’ve Gone,” while “Dusky Stevedore” is reenvisioned by Fletcher Henderson.

A similar venture produced a folio of “Radio Theme Songs” of twenty-five bandleaders and singers, which partly accounts for Davis copyrighting arrangements for “O Sole Mio” and “Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes.” The former, rather surprisingly, turned up at a Wingy Manone session for Davis in 1944. If nothing else, the folio featured nice photographs of otherwise seldom-seen artists and, again typically Davis, all those white faces

were broken up by the presence of black pianists/composers Claude Hopkins and Earl Hines.

True to his proud claim to publish the first of so many important popular composers, Davis added the name of Fred Rose in 1935. Fred eventually headed the massive music publishing firm of Acuff-Rose, but it was Joe Davis who first published "In That Vine-Covered Chapel," which suited Davis's sentimental streak. In his "How Not to Write a Popular Song" essay, which could have been written around this time, as he was then president of Joe Davis, Inc., Davis advised that "the love interest always sells and always will." Joe Davis, Inc., certainly followed its president's advice taking aboard, as it did in 1935, the likes of Bill Heagney's "In the Land of Golden Dreams" and "Moonbeams and Memories."

But then 1935 was a surprisingly good year for Hawaii. Spencer Williams submitted "Chimes of Honolulu" and "By the Calm Lagoon" (a song that implies the island, but is not explicitly set in Hawaii), and also "Hawaiian Kisses" under a pseudonym. Paul Denniker contributed "Hawaiian Star Light" and "In My Dreams of Waikiki." Both Bill Heagney and Marvin Smolev added similar titles to a genre that clearly fascinated Joe Davis.

The use of pseudonyms continued unabated and included more for J. Russel Robinson—"John Dillinger" being his Joe Hoover-written title, which showed an odd fascination with gangster "heroes." Joe Davis himself sometimes published as John Hancock during the mid- to late 1930s. Vaudevillian Eddie Green wrote "I'm Truckin' Away from You" in an attempt to update his image. D. Sanford looked as far into the future as anyone else at that time with "In 1983."

For hillbilly enthusiasts, the most interesting entries for the year were a number of titles by fiddler Arthur Smith. These included traditional tunes such as "Black Cherry Blossom," "Fiddler's Dream" (*sic*, not "Fiddler's Dram"), "Lost Train Blues," "Red Apple Rag," "Smith Waltz," and "Spring Street Waltz." Somebody at Victor certainly worked hard on Davis's behalf, for these exact titles were recorded in New Orleans on January 1935. Four days before, Victor recorded "Alberta" by a cajun band, the Walker Brothers. "Black Cherry Blossom" was issued as "Blackberry Blossom" and is subsequently always so known. Once more we have a possible southeastern connection; a Spring Street set prominently near downtown Charlotte, North Carolina.

In Davis's eyes, one of the biggest money-spinners for the year was likely to be a song from the 1936 edition of "Connie's Hot Chocolates." Written by Sammy Cahn and Saul Chaplin, it enjoyed a good pedigree but the title was little more than a stereotype: "Darkies Have Music in Their



Souls." Perhaps some of them might have replied with an Andy Razaf title from that same year: "I Ain't Your Hen, Mr. Fly Rooster."

One matter vexing Davis during the early part of 1935, at least, was his position within ASCAP. Clearly frustrated with what he felt to be his lack of progress within the Society, Davis wrote them in March stating his position. He received a letter dated March 29 from Louis Bernstein of music publishers Shapiro, Bernstein & Co. on the behalf of the Society. In his reply Davis stated that "he realized that the letter was personal on your part and is not really official, although you have been a member of the board since 1914." It is perhaps worth looking in some detail at a seldom-seen facet of the music publishing world. Davis's letter continued:

At the present writing, I have no desire and do not intend to sign another contract with the Society, as I feel that they have been very unfair with me and have not encouraged the progress I have been making on the marvelous catalog I am building up. At one of the recent meetings, I submitted a list of my plugs and if an authentic analysis was made and a true comparison shown, my plugs have been far greater for the past two years than many other firms that are getting three, four or five times as much as I am in dividends from the Society . . .

Do you realize that since the third quarter of 1931 I have been in the same class? . . . each application for advancement I made was rejected. There is no fairness there and although I considered to start court action several months ago, after my last application was turned down, I finally decided to let it go at that, in view of the fact that my contract with the Society terminates the end of this year.

The little amount of money I am getting from the Society really does not make much difference in my business, but I think that new blood should be encouraged and the Society evidently does not want the young blood to get any place.

Of all the Publishers that have started in business in the last ten years, very few can match the progress I have made or the value of Copyrights for performing purposes.

Of course my contract with the Society terminates the end of this year and plenty of things may happen to make me change my mind about renewing it, but at present writing, I feel that I will not re-sign, owing to the fact that I am not getting a square deal.

With kindest personal regards,



The file copy was marked bottom left "JD:AR." "AR" was Davis's secretary, Ada Rubin, better known to jazz collectors as "Queenie" Ada Rubin, pianist with Tempo King and his Kings of Tempo in the mid-1930s. As usual, Davis shot straight from the shoulder and Louis Bernstein considered the letter of such importance that he replied on the same day. One can see why he had been given the task of conciliation and there can be no doubt that the following extract was so intended:

I am . . . awfully sorry to see you feel about this matter as you do . . . Let me assure you that I have always felt that the Board was trying honestly and sincerely to do a good job, and the Society does encourage young blood, contrary to your statement. I have always done so, as you know, and have always felt for the newer publishers, to get as good a break as possible.

If you had come to see me personally, at any time, and allowed me to present your case to the Board, I might have showed them the thing in a somewhat different light, and if you still want to come to me sometime, I shall be very glad to see you,—not that I want to urge you or induce you to sign the contract, that's up to you to do of your own free will, but because I want to try and convince you in every way that I can maybe you might be wrong.

Cordially yours,  
Louis Bernstein

Presumably Bernstein's tactful intervention prevented ASCAP from losing Davis, for he remained with them, and no further correspondence seems to have ensued. Possibly Davis took up Bernstein's offer to call on him. Something certainly must have taken place sufficiently to satisfy a clearly aggrieved Davis.

Davis might have been making his protest on a number of fronts for he received a copy of a letter sent by ASCAP to a columnist in the *New York Enquirer*, dated April 3, 1935. It ran as follows:

Dear Mr. Wickes:

In your column—"SONG LEADERS ON THE AIR"—in the "Enquirer," issue of March 31st, you make the following statement—"Since 1921, Joe Davis, the publisher, hasn't budged an inch either way in ASCAP, yet his radio activities have increased 1,000% . . . This is the kind of

stuff that prompts Congressmen and others to look upon the Society as a racket.”

Just why you should make a statement of this sort I am unable to understand. Whatever the source of your information, it is just 100% incorrect . . . Joe Davis has not been a member of the Society since 1921. The firm was elected to membership in 1926; and its classification has been consistently advanced with but one reduction during the membership, and that on account of decidedly decreased activities . . .

I regret that you should so hastily make a condemnatory statement without first ascertaining the facts. I do hope that Mr. Davis himself was not the source of your information, and I think it would be no more than fair to correct your insinuation that the record of his connection with ASCAP would justify regarding the Society as a “racket.”

Whether or not Mr. Wickes made a retraction, Davis stayed with ASCAP, but the disagreement foreshadowed another disagreement involving Davis and this trade organization.

Irrespective of this dispute, the question of airplay remained high in his priorities for 1935. Davis kept a tab the following year of them: 116,708 performances of 302 titles. That is an impressive performance from any perspective and lends some weight to Davis’s argument.

### Christopher Columbus

As it happened, 1936 became the year of a different pioneer, Christopher Columbus. This jazz tune enjoyed ten times as much airplay in the following year, thus underscoring its popularity. In his meticulous study of Fletcher Henderson, Walter C. Allen described its origins as follows:

There was one particular tune which soon became forever associated with Fletcher Henderson: CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. Reportedly based on a bawdy song, CRISTOFORO COLOMBO, in the instrumental form it had been built around a riff played by Chu Berry. Horace Henderson wrote a tune around it (Jimmy Lunceford later claimed that one of HIS men used to fool around with this riff, and as a result he sued the song’s publisher), and Claude Hopkins first played it in public. Horace gave his arrangement of it to Fletcher, who used it as a signature number when he was booked into the Grand Terrace;

later, it was to become his official “theme song.” Publisher Joe Davis heard it over the air, and contacted Fletcher, who in turn assigned Horace to write a stock for public sale. Horace did just that, using the same arrangement as was played by his brother’s band, and put down his own and Chu Berry’s names as composers. Joe Davis published it, but added lyrics (credited to Andy Razaf), listed Chu Berry as the only composer, and listed Larry Clinton (!) as arranger. Chu got \$300, Fletcher got \$100, but poor Horace got NOTHING—not even a line of credit or recognition. (Walter Allen, *Hendersonia*, 332)

Whatever the claim of Horace Henderson to some recognition, the sheet music carried only Berry’s name besides Razaf’s, but Davis added an interesting, significant footnote: “All rights reserved, including the right of public performance for profit.” The “public performance for profit” royalties for such a popular song would be very lucrative, if one could collect.

Incidentally, Berry’s contract, dated March 31, 1936, showed him to have received an advance of \$275.00. It quickly became a nationwide hit and other bands hurried to make cover versions. The Henderson version had been made on March 27, followed by another Davis-published tune, “Big Chief De Sota,” renamed “Grand Terrace Swing.” Fats Waller recorded “Christopher Columbus” on April 8 and featured it on the Rudy Vallee Show of June 4. Just before that the Teddy Hill band had gone in to ARC and cut it on April 1, with tenor man Cecil Scott replacing Chu Berry, who had been in the band’s recording personnel the year before. Hill’s version remained unreleased and, in reply to a letter from Davis offering a mechanical contract, their recording manager wrote back on April 20 that “we rejected a recording of ‘Christopher Columbus’ by Teddy Hill which was made several weeks ago. This record will not be issued by this company under any label we manufacture.” By April 28, however, Willie Lewis was recording it in Paris for Pathe, with Big Boy Goudie on tenor sax.

Cashing in on the impact of “Christopher Columbus” in his broadcasts, Fletcher Henderson also presented Davis with “Grand Terrace Rhythm,” which he recorded for Victor on May 23, 1936. Its other title was “D Natural Blues,” which he had recorded for Columbia in 1928. Walter C. Allen tactfully pointed out that it was actually in D flat.

By now Fats Waller’s connection with Joe Davis was less obvious and more tenuous, although he did turn in “Wait and See” with lyrics by Andy Razaf. Waller featured a Davis-owned tune at practically every Victor

session in 1936. For example, Fred Rose's "Moon Rose" opened that of February 1, 1936, while "S'posin'" kicked off the September 9 session.

After the huge success of "Christopher Columbus," Davis quickly sought a follow-up. Chu Berry wrote firstly "William Tell," presumably on the theory that heroes were hot copy, but he reverted the following year back to the fifteenth century with "Queen Isabella." Perhaps the Razaf-Denniker-Davis effort with "Nero" followed a similar logic. Sadly, none of them showed the popularity of Mr. Columbus.

One helpful hit for Davis, more by accident than design at first, was "Lookin' for Love" by Mike Riley and Ed Farley. When Decca issued their recording of September 26, they added the missing "g." But this pleasant side of Decca 578 mattered less than the flip, which became one of those melodies that irritatingly stick in the mind. "The Music Goes 'Round and Around," with lyrics of limited intellectual depth, nonetheless sold in huge quantities. The following month Decca cut a new master but retained the same issue number, with Davis's song on the B side. Davis received the same mechanical royalty as the top side, a policy not unknown to the present day.

Davis continued to support current writers, often pianists, such as Earl Hines. His "Madhouse," cowritten by Jimmy Mundy, was recorded for Victor by Benny Goodman in September 1935, when Fletcher Henderson was also arranging for him. Henderson, of course, arranged Goodman's version of "Christopher Columbus" in March 1936.

Another current performer, New Orleans trumpeter Wingy Manone, was new to Davis's stable but would cut sessions for him a few years hence. He recorded "Swingin' at the Hickory House" for Bluebird in April 1936, which Davis bought. The Bluebird release used "Dallas Blues," another Davis tune on its flip. Clarinetist Joe Marsala and pianist Conrad Lanoue from that 1936 session remained with Manone for his 1944 session for Davis.

Names from the musical past dotted Davis's growing catalogue. Pianists Zez Confrey and J. Russel Robinson contributed tunes; Robinson's "The Mayor of Toytown" did very well for Davis, though at a much later date. Pianist Harry Brooks wrote "Low Tide," although the handwritten original lead sheet named J. C. Johnson. "Low Tide" was plugged as the theme song of black bandleader Le Roy Smith, whose photograph was featured on the sheet music. Smith hadn't recorded since 1928, but Brooks had been the pianist on his first session back in 1921.

"Make-Believe Ballroom," a Razaf-Denniker composition, quickly gained momentum and Davis leapt with glee upon its mention in the *Daily Mirror* for September 2, 1936, in the "On Broadway" column of the very influential Walter Winchell. He merely stated that "Charlie Barnett's crew radioing: 'Make-Believe Ballroom' tune, a tuneful thing." Not everybody would find this clumsy line of much help, but Davis saw fit to duplicate part of the column onto a postcard, which he mailed to interested parties. Typically, he went to elaborate lengths to credit the paper in full, even adding "(Trade Mark Registered) Copyright, 1936, Daily Mirror, Inc."

Davis also published the likes of "Old New England March," "Hawaiian Love Song," and "Tell Santy I Live in a Shanty" in order to reach the widest possible market, but by and large it had been a good year. The humorous side remained with a Razaf-Denniker song, "Am I On." Davis himself kept his sense of humor. He produced another postcard, this time with a well-drawn sketch of himself on bended knees, hands wringing, largely bald, sweating and asking the tune title of a haughtily contemptuous bandleader, who is saying, "My next ten programs are in, but I'll see what I can do, pal." It is credited as "a Joe Davis struglication."

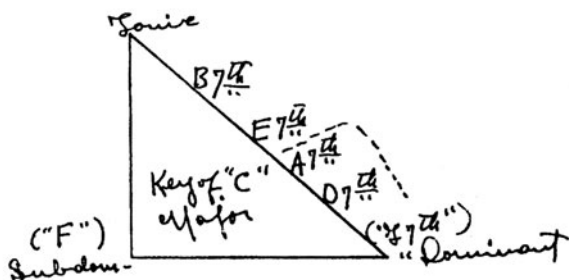
One new, very ambitious venture—a study of piano music from ragtime to swing—upon which Joe Davis embarked in 1937, although uncharacteristically failed to complete, was tentatively called "A Survey Of Jazz Transitions." He once told his daughter that a book by him ought to be entitled *Never Sell a Copyright*, for to his regret, he was forced to do so late in life. In the brief, introductory page to this manuscript, Davis asks us to imagine someone who decided to "go Rip Van Winkle one better" and awoken in 1937, having gone to sleep in 1900. "His clothing would attract the most attention," he points out. "Just look at those peg-leg pantaloons . . . his huge, box-back coat reaching almost to the knees with its large checkered pattern nearly screaming with loudness." He then reminisces fascinatingly about the advent of ragtime as he recalled it: "L.G. was a first rate ragtime piano player. Ragtime was something that Grandmother had forbidden us to listen to on Sundays . . . It was something that my young aunt said, 'wasn't really music,' although she always seemed visibly moved by L.G.'s playing and what is more I discovered gaudy oversized copies of sheet music in the sacred precincts of her trunk . . . I frankly admit that, young as I was, L.G.'s rendition of a current 'hit' or one of his own 'specials' always enraptured me. But alas! L.G.'s playing would not suit me today, that is, unless he kept up with the changing styles. His treble would be as

antedated as the box-back coat of our fairy-tale friend and his bass as antiquated as the peg-leg pantaloons."

Following this intriguing and effective introduction to the concept of changing styles he divides the music, simplistically, into *Ragtime*, *Jazz* or *Jazz*, and *Swing*. He describes various approaches to time, deciding that ragtime required "but simple harmonization," and shows the pattern in the diagram which follows together with the preceding paragraph from his original manuscript:

For an example, let us assume that the following triangle represents the key of 'C' and that its three points represent the principal chords of that key. Four other chords likely to be needed even for simple harmonisation are the ones arranged on the hypotenuse. Their succession of importance ranges upward from the Dominant (07ths).

(.6c..)



He then reproduces several scores and explains various arrangements to show the growth from ragtime. Naturally he uses his own tunes, like "S'posin," "Keepin' Out of Mischief Now," "Christopher Columbus," and "I Ain't Got Nobody" but he adds occasional "tricks" or ornamentations by named artists in these interpretations. For "Christopher Columbus," the last tackled, he commences with "J. Lawrence Cook's Original Interpretation," ending it "in the Waller mood." He ends reassuringly with "I doubt that many will find it difficult to make the stretch (treble) required by this chord. Be sure that you play that final Bb octavo basso (an octave lower than written) as indicated. In other words, play the lowest Bb on the keyboard." He clearly hoped to convert the musician with little or no formal training and to add a piano folio to his catalogue. The unpublished manuscript ends with the hope that we have enjoyed our journey through the *Song Book for Piano*. Why Davis never completed and published this folio remains unknown. But it's a pity because it would have been one of the

earliest attempts to educate a wider audience into the musical world he had loved and known for several decades.

Joe Davis expressed his pride in the 116,708 performances of his songs in 1936, but the upswing was maintained and even improved in 1937. The first two quarters of the year were on target to equal plays but the third quarter produced nearly 48,000 so that only 75 percent of the way through 1937 his tunes produced 111,129½ performances. Whatever the half may have been, it didn't show up on his listing.

What did show up was a total of slightly over 21,500 performances of "Christopher Columbus," almost 20 percent of the total. The next heaviest performed, "Basin Street Blues," earned 8,805 plays, although the popular Bing Crosby-Connie Boswell recording for Decca in September was just about to be released. The next few, for comparison's sake, were "After You've Gone" with 7,163 plays and "Big Chief De Sota" with 4,524. They were followed by "Make Believe Ball Room" (*sic*), "Sweet Hawaiian Moonlight," "Sunset in Bermuda," and "I Just Made Up with That Old Girl of Mine," each with between 3,300 and 3,900 performances.

It is really fascinating to read the number of performances of popular and swing tunes versus die-hard jazz items. Waller's "Viper's Drag" and "Effervescent" and J. C. Johnson's "Take Your Tomorrow," "Willie the Weeper," "Georgia Gigolo," and "Monkey and the Baboon" each received only one performance. "Blue Turning Grey Over You" received just double that. Rosedale's "Everyone's Home Town" secured over 1,600 plays, presumably over local radio. "Everyone's Home Town" also found its way into the free "Alka-Seltzer Songbook" as the center-page, as sung by Uncle Ezra. Other artists featured included the pseudo-country Hoosier Hot Shots and Lulu Belle and Scotty.

The lesson here is quite clear. Davis's acumen dictated that he include popular songs with well-crafted material that might not prove so popular. In this light one can well understand why he augmented his catalogue with "Is I Gotta Go to School Ma?" and "I'm Twisting Loops in Pretzels" (373 combined). Hawaii also remained a winner in this field with a total of 3,920 plays.

Songbooks and folios had taken over from the individual sheet in many respects. This approach also allowed Davis to recycle tunes to which he already owned the rights. You could have "50 Popular Hawaiian Songs," "50 Top Songs of the Roaming Ranger," the "Carson J. Robison Songbook," and an entertainment and minstrel album all for one dollar, according to an advertisement in *Sheer Folly*, a girlie magazine of July 1937.

Davis also published the *Fats Waller Piano Pranks* book, “5 solos for the price of one, still 60 cents.” Overseas the Australian music publishers, Collins, offered this Waller folio as *Novelty Piano Album No. 1*, at a modest two shillings, or two shillings and two pence via the postal service. Collins also published three Hawaiian folios—with all Davis songs—and also *Sob Song Folio No. 1*, consisting of ten Art Gillham’s songs. A Claude Hopkins folio of five tunes was also published by Davis at 60 cents and Eubie Blake offered a 40-cent *Moods of Harlem*.

Imaginatively, Davis also offered a guitar song folio of twenty-six tunes for 50 cents along with *Modern Songs for Children*, *Fats Waller’s Victor Record Song Hits* (twenty of them), the *Saxophone Folio*, the *Piano Accordion Folio*, *Nice Songs for Naughty People* (which he used for a Betty Thornton 4 x 78 rpm “album” in 1946), *Songs My Father Taught Me (Not to Sing)*, and *Songs They DON’T Sing in School*. These last three presaged by some twenty years the twelve-inch long-playing albums that were to cause him so much financial trouble. As of April 1, 1936, Davis dropped his exclusive distributor, Maurice Richmond, and tried to hit dealers and jobbers himself, offering 40-cent folios at a dealer rate of 23 cents. From time to time, he later ran his record companies using a similar sales method. He never did care for the middleman.

Among all this increased business, Davis himself continued writing songs. Perhaps this was partly an attempt to offset the reduced output of Fats Waller and Alex Hill, as well as Spencer Williams, who was away in England at the time. Many of Davis’s own efforts were in conjunction with Bobby Gregory—sometimes the two had help from Vernon Dalhart—but most were written with Paul Denniker, although the old Denniker-Razaf twosome was still writing the range from “Mem’ries of Southern Seas” through “Antiquated Papa” to “Shake Your Can,” “She’s Nine Months Gone,” and “Where Can I Find a Cherry,” which had to wait until 1945 to be recorded by Wingy Manone. Claude Hopkins and Fred Norman wrote titles in the Hopkins folio, like “Crazy Fingers” and “Grotesque,” as well as “Monkey Business.” James P. Johnson, with Razaf, offered “Go Harlem” and “Havin’ a Ball,” and in collaboration with lyricist Louis Douglass wrote the tunes for the show *Policy Kings*, produced by Michael Ashwood and directed by Douglass.

A new name to appear in the credits was the young pianist Johnny Guarnieri, then playing in George Hall’s band. Both their names appear on “Bass Habits” and “Olga on the Volga.” Despite recording over fifty titles that year, neither of these appeared among them, although “Bass Habits”



was recorded late in 1937 by George Hall for a Thesaurus radio-play transcription disc. One addition, which again pointed to future Davis releases, was the acceptance of "Puppy Dog's Tail" by one of the Trietsch brothers from the Hoosier Hot Shots, probably Hezzie. He issued dozens of sides in the 1940s by the Korn Kobbler, a similar hokey quasi-country unit.

One Waller-Alex Hill collaboration, on which Davis added lyrics, was "Our Love Was Meant to Be," which Waller recorded on September 7, 1937, for Victor. Less than three weeks later, Decca recorded "Basin Street Blues" as a vocal duet by Bing Crosby and Connie Boswell. Once more Joe Davis made up a small postcard from Ed Sullivan's column in the *Daily News* for September 27, 1937, which reported on the Hollywood session of the twenty-fifth—though the column reported it as the twenty-sixth: "Watching Bing Crosby and Connie Boswell record for Jack Kapp [said Sullivan] is an experience in swing at its best. Crosby was wearing a panama, a white shirt not tucked in at the trousers. 'It's my pajama jacket,' he told the hecklers in Johnny Trotter's band. The trombone player's name, so help me, was Abe Lincoln. Connie Boswell, in a yellow sweater, her hair tied with a green ribbon sat on a high stool at the microphone as she and Bing collabbed on a new version of 'Basin Street Blues.' 'Come on, Cats,' said Crosby. In swing parlance, 'cats' are the hottest of the hot musicians. The song ended, the master record made, one of the musicians said: 'The "alligators" will love that song, Bing.' I turned to Crosby in bewilderment. 'An alligator is a musician's description of the collegiate kids who stand near a bandstand and listen to a tune with their mouths open like an alligator,' explained Crosby."

This sort of gossip column hype became commonplace and veteran session man Lincoln must have been well fed up with that sort of comment. It does, however, provide a brief glimpse at the informality of a Bing Crosby session and his easy working relationship with his favorite recording outfit, to say nothing of a term (alligator) that didn't enter most vocabularies until twenty years later. On one Bing Crosby West Coast session—probably with John Scott Trotter's orchestra—the famous singer told the band to listen to what Abe Lincoln was playing, as he had been recording since 1926, when he was a teenager with the California Ramblers.

One final interesting collaboration, "Am I Dreaming?" was written by Davis and Bobby Gregory, assisted by the well-known bandleader Charles Dornberger. The front and back covers of the sheet music consist of forty-nine circles each, formed in a square, with a picture of a different bandleader and vocalist in each. It makes interesting browsing, for there

are many whose names pop out of discographies or off record labels but are otherwise little more than names. Suddenly, in the very middle of the front forty-nine is a picture of Jewel Davis, his elder daughter.

Besides simply buying the occasional song, other ways existed to expand in music publishing. Davis bought out the assets of Lincoln Music Corporation in the summer of 1937, or more accurately, facilitated a mortgage loan against a series of promissory notes, which extended until April 22, 1938. The assets consisted of the premises of Lincoln Music at 1619 Broadway—together with “all its furniture and fixtures, and copyrights.” Davis even bought advertising space in the *National Police Gazette* for May 1937, which also ran an article about his entry into the music business, together with a photograph not seen elsewhere.

### Payola, Plagiarism, and Airplay

One of doubtless many new words coined during 1938 was to remain for many years as part of music publishing terminology. *Variety* for October 19, 1938, used the term “payola” to refer to the bribery and corruption then rampant in the song-plugging business, and hence in the song-hit business. Since the 1920s music publishers had “cut-in” bandleaders or popular singers to help promote their songs and even ASCAP was obliged to inform its members of the commercial bribery laws in New York State.

The Federal Communications Commission found that over 50 percent of all airplay consisted of popular or light music in a typical week in 1938. The National Association of Broadcasters two years later, using the ASCAP performance lists of 1938, established that just 388 songs accounted for over 47 percent of all performances; almost 8,500,000 network performances during the year. These 388 songs each received more than 10,000 individual performances. No wonder Davis kept his own list for a while, from 1936 onward. (See Russell Sanjek, *From Print to Plastic: Publishing and Promoting American's Popular Music [1900–1980]*, ISAM Monograph No. 20 [Brooklyn, NY: Institute for the Studies in American Music, 1983], 17. This fascinating study informs the latter half of this chapter.)

His 1936 total of 116,708 plays had almost been reached in the first three-quarters of 1937, and that year's total was 141,605. Unlike “Christopher Columbus,” which clocked over 21,000 plays in 1937, the highest reached in 1938—the figures for a few D titles are incomplete—is 13,304 for “When Two Love Each Other,” with over 8,000 for each of “Basin Street

Blues," "Am I Dreaming," and "Toy Town Band." "Viper's Drag" repeated its 1936 total of only one playing but "Blue Turning Grey Over You" climbed to 24.

Davis's total in the first quarter of 1938 reached 47,823½ plays, 100 fewer than the peak third quarter in 1937, but then they climbed steadily until there were nearly 75,000 in the final quarter of 1938, making the total for the year just over 247,000. Of his copyrighted arrangements of material in the public domain, only "Red River Valley" continued to show much popularity (just under 6,000), while the next highest was "She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain" (299), with only six others topping 100 each.

One other permanent problem in the music publishing business is the threat of plagiarism. Many writers knew how close to be able to sail to the wind without actually lifting sufficient of the material to transgress the law of copyright. But, at times, they crossed the line.

On June 3, 1937, Fletcher Henderson recorded "Chris and His Gang," featuring an arrangement by his brother, Horace. It certainly wasn't long before Davis came to know of this and instructed Dell Lampe, who wrote many of his lead sheets, to break down the tune to see if there was a case for plagiarism. Only ten days after the tune was recorded, Dell Lampe wrote Davis in detail and submitted a musically annotated breakdown of "Chris and His Gang" and "Christopher Columbus." The handwritten letter is of considerable interest as an insight to a perennial problem:

Joe,

No doubt the composers of Chris and his gang drew heavily on your own "Christopher Columbus" but I believe that they have purposely advoided [*sic*] making it too similar.

At A, which is the main strain of "Christopher Columbus," there is a marked similarity for eight bars. The actual notes of "Christopher Columbus" being advoided [*sic*] by its rhythmic construction.

At B no similarity occurs except may be at the last two bars of "Chris and his Gang" where two bars are made of a figure used in "Christopher Columbus."

At C the figure which distinguishes "Christopher Columbus" is used again with a slight rhythmic alteration.

I really don't believe the evidence of pirating is strong enough to give you a clear cut case and it might be just as well to ignore it with the thought that "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

A further sidelight on the problems between Davis and ASCAP, which had come to a head in 1935, is revealed by a note on Davis's chart of published selections and their performances, 1936–1939. Davis observed that important copyrights were assigned by Gem Music Corporation to Joe Davis, Inc., on September 14, 1938. Significantly, after these copyrights were assigned to Joe Davis, Inc., they displayed a ten-point increase in availability, which enhanced the value of his copyright catalogue. Although the total number of extra titles to his catalogue remained constant with the previous year, few displayed obvious commercial merit.

Nonetheless, in the wake of Ed Sullivan's "alligator" reference, Davis used the best part of the phrase that covered "alligator" music of the 1950s in his "Rockin' Rollers' Jubilee." Erskine Hawkins recorded it for Bluebird in September 1938 and one of his reedmen, Haywood Henry, later appeared on many recording sessions for Davis-only labels, for a decade from the mid-1950s. Bunny Berigan, a very popular white swing trumpeter, recorded it the following month on Victor. These fall 1938 sessions mark one of the earliest uses of the "rockin' rollin'" phrase in recording history.

One Newt Oliphant wrote "Black Man's Lullaby." His true identity remains unknown, but it seems unlikely to have been the William Oliphant who became Will Osborne. One of his tunes that gained something of a revival was "I Ain't Got Nobody," featured in Adolph Zukor's film, *Paris Honeymoon*, with Bing Crosby. Davis reprinted the sheet music with a full-page photograph of Crosby from the film. Fats Waller resided in London for a while during the summer and managed to squeeze in some Davis-covered arrangements for HMV when he cut his pipe-organ solos of Negro spirituals. Another interesting title added to the catalogue around the same time was Willie "The Lion" Smith's "Curfew Time in Harlem," although he didn't record it immediately.

Ever aware of the need to broaden his musical catalogue, Davis bought the rights to many old hymns, previously published in a book called *Home Hymn Book*, from the owner, one C. Lewellen Gaskill, of Staten Island. For one hundred dollars he obtained eleven original hymns and the copyrights of arrangements existing on the remaining non-copyright hymns. Even in the field of country music he was finding his titles more in demand. Twice in a month late in 1938, Brunswick asked him for permission to use titles for country music sessions: "My Window Faces South," recorded by Bob Wills, and "Riding on the Old Ferris Wheel," by Hank Penny. The latter,

without help from Penny in view of the late recording date, had clocked up some 900 performances during 1938.

Davis also continued to copyright material recorded by Victor's race artists, including the entire Sonny Boy Williamson session for June 17, 1938. Pianist Walter Davis, who was accompanying Sonny Boy on record for the first time, provided the most probable link here. Davis had already copyrighted many of his blues, though guitarist Joe Williams was also present. Thus it remains entirely possible that Joe Davis's connection here was nothing more than a continuation of that link with race artists, which seems to have commenced with Eli Oberstein.

Joe Davis made progress of his own in this respect. An "Artists Letter Agreement" was signed by Edward Wallerstein of RCA on May 18, 1938, with Joe Davis (as a person rather than with Joe Davis, Inc., his music publishing firm), which referred to "6 recordings to be made by you and the Musical Organization on the 18 day of May 1938 at our Recording Studio." In legal parlance, the Musical Organization was to be "Ruby Smith w. piano," and she made six titles that day in Camden, New Jersey, accompanied by Blind John Davis. All six titles were issued on Bluebird, which netted Davis and Ruby Smith some three hundred dollars, as the agreement was for fifty dollars "after approval of the Master record."

Top-selling artist Blind Boy Fuller received only twenty dollars a title, so it seems likely that the high fee was due to Davis's active promotion, possibly as manager as he had been with Martha Copeland. After all, this marked Ruby Smith's recording debut, so she had no reputation to call upon. What connection Ruby Smith had with Davis is not known, but as she was the niece of Bessie Smith's husband, Jack Gee, the link could have been there. Ruby Smith recorded "Draggin' My Heart Around" as her last title on the Bluebird session, and the following year recorded twice with James P. Johnson's band, so possibly the connection lasted beyond the one session for RCA. At least Davis kept one finger on the pulse of the race market. At this time, however, he could not have realized that within a few years he would be entering it as a record producer, undercutting the major companies like RCA and Columbia, for whom he had been arranging sessions.

By 1939 the Hollywood motion picture empire had largely taken over control of the hit-making tunes. Approximately 30 percent of the popular-music publishers in New York collected just over two-thirds of the money distributed by ASCAP, and every one of those was affiliated in some way with the motion picture business (Sanjek, *From Print to Plastic*, 19).

Nonetheless, the new breed of A&R men—most notably Decca Records' Jack Kapp—were beginning to produce their own form of hit-making, far divorced from Hollywood. They believed that promotion based on initial public response rather than a blanket push from headquarters, as with the movies, opened new markets for them. Because of his minimal connection with the motion picture, this made little immediate difference to Joe Davis, but it eventually paved the way for the possibility of greater individual flair in producing and promoting tunes and records. Although no one could foresee it then, this fresh approach signaled a sea change within a decade.

However, in the first quarter of 1939 Joe Davis successfully increased his efforts to publicize his songs. A total of 91,974½ performances well outstripped any previous quarter and plays were up almost 100 percent over the same period in 1938. Songs continued to be added from such talented and trusted writers as James P. Johnson, whose "Elevator Papa, Switchboard Mama" earned him a 12½ percent royalty, as well as Willie "The Lion" Smith and Andy Razaf. The latter, with Davis, penned the ballad "Lucille," "dedicated to my daughter," as Davis explained on the manuscript.

A few further additions to the catalogue underscores the range of Davis's music publishing involvements. From veteran singer Al Bernard, he acquired the *Southland Minstrel Folio*, for which he paid \$100.00 advance and a 33⅓ percent royalty. Bob Causer assigned Davis his share of the part-written Charlie Fulcher tune, "Little Boy," adding the footnote, "Joe: I am having this arranged immediately and sending a copy to Tommy Dorsey and Glen Gray." From the improbable duo of Porter Grainger and Ollie Shepard (who fronted one of the first R&B bands to record) came "Can't You Take a Little Joke," but it would appear to have gone no further. In November 1939, Davis copyrighted "It's Harlem's Music" by Mickey Castle (née Catalano) and Steven A. Gibson, who later recorded extensively for Davis as the leader of the Red Caps.

*The Billboard* for January 14, 1939, ran the leader—DAVIS AIDS TYRO WRITERS—in which it described Davis as offering "a criticism service bureau for amateur tune-smiths." For "a nominal charge for constructive criticism and possible publication by Davis firm" (Music Friends' Service, Inc.) hoped to "eliminate song shark evil." For all of Joe Davis's use of gimmickry and every music publisher's desire to be one step ahead of the rest, he nonetheless created an element of the crusader about him. Davis joyfully issued a four-page pamphlet, on glossy paper, using *The Billboard* article and listing writers, such as Rube Bloom and Larry Clinton, to whom Davis gave the "first break by publishing the first composition." The pamphlet

included one page of how to submit your tune and a page-long essay by E. C. Mills—"WHAT IS A.S.C.A.P.?" Unfortunately, we don't know if any of the people who submitted their tunes—together with \$2.00—to Music Friends' Service, Inc. (Joe Davis served as its president, while his loyal manager, Clarence Steinberg, was general manager) benefited from their advice.

Davis always hoped a major artist would cover one of his tunes and in March 1939 wrote to John Hammond at ARC offering him the proof of a new instrumental tune that he would "start to work on soon," hoping he could place it with "Harry James or one of your bands." "Friday the 13th" was published, with lyrics by Jerry Sears, but it left Hammond unimpressed. Perhaps Davis felt satisfied, some years later, when *he* was able to purchase the rights to some Harry James 1940 titles from the defunct Varsity label and issue them on his own Davis label. At least, in April 1939, Bing Crosby recorded his big hit "S'posin'" for Decca. The future star from the session, an obscure drummer, Spike Jones, eventually formed the City Slickers—and became one of the twentieth century's most brilliant and commercially successful musical satirists.

Dorsey Dixon, a millworker from Rockingham, North Carolina, lived at the other end of the musical world from Spike Jones. At the end of April 1939, Davis received an offer from Dixon, who specialized in hillbilly songs, often with a topical theme. Davis quickly purchased seven songs from Dixon, who drew up his own notarized contract, for \$140.00 in an outright sale.

In May 1939 he once more wrote to the Library of Congress to check on copyright renewal of certain songs on which copyright would have lapsed and which he felt might be valuable additions if available. The Library of Congress wrote back that same month to inform him that renewals had been received on nine of the ten about which he had inquired. "That Minor Strain," by Cecil Mack (R. C. McPherson) and Ford Dabney, registered in 1910, had not been renewed and Davis wrote cryptically in the margin, "Write to Wash for this." Most of the remaining nine were Ford Dabney, Chris Smith, or Bert Williams copyrights.

One small but telling example of the wheels-within-wheels world of music publishing remained on file among Davis's effects. Andy Razaf wrote to Joe Davis in May 1939 about "Old Knock-Kneed Sal," written by Zilner T. Randolph, who is perhaps best known as a member of Louis Armstrong's trumpet section for the 1931–1932 Okeh recording band. The tune had been released on the B side of a recent Decca Ink Spots disc but Randolph, worried that he had not published this song, wrote to Decca and to Lil



Armstrong (Louis Armstrong's ex-wife), who pitched the song to Decca. Razaf saw the replies from Lil Armstrong and Decca's Mayo Williams and wrote to Davis on Randolph's headed notepaper, suggesting that Randolph "turn this number over to you as he has not, as yet, placed it . . . He is a crack arranger and can send you an arrangement and lyrics . . . if you are interested."

Lil Armstrong, writing from New York, assured Randolph (whose original letter was not in Davis's file) that there was nothing "to be alarmed about as I understand royalties on those records aren't due yet." "Anyway," she ended, "I'll let you know everything, as they have those assignments that we signed." The placatory style of Lil Armstrong was not reflected in Mayo Williams's more strident letter: "I wish to say that I was very much surprised by its contents . . . you could hardly jump at any conclusions as to business dealings with me." Then Williams firmly puts Randolph in his place and one sees why he rose to the positions he held:

Please be informed that this song by virtue of its merits was not recorded on that phase of the work solely, but largely because of my selecting the song from one of many that Lil Armstrong had and it could have been left on the shelf as easily as it was selected. Further, the recording of the number by the Ink Spots is a further example of my influence, as this song happens to be the "B" side of a record . . . and there isn't one person in a thousand that could tell you the name of the song that is on the other side of the "If I Didn't Care" record.

A further thrust from Mayo Williams in fact neatly encapsulates much of what happened in Joe Davis's field of business: "I merely mention these things in order that you might know that songs just don't happen on records but are recorded because of some connections and contacts that different people have with the recording engagements and artists."

It says something for Zilner Randolph's spirit that he looked past this most dismissive of letters, so that Andy Razaf could bring it to Joe Davis's attention. It also speaks volumes that Joe Davis apparently passed on this deal, though it might just have been the contact itself that brought Lil Armstrong to his attention in 1939. Less than four years later he was to record one of her tunes at one of his own first recording sessions.

In December 1939, Davis decided to sell off Joe Davis, Inc., to William Horowitz and Abner Silver, although he retained ownership of Georgia Music Corp. (itself changed from Georgia Music Co. in July 1939) and had



transferred titles from Aloha Music and others. In order to clarify matters with the British Mechanical Copyright Protection Society Ltd., he actually sent a four-page listing of some four hundred Georgia Music titles that had been recorded for Victor and Bluebird.

In September he had asked Spencer Williams, then residing in England, if he would approve of various transfers from one music publishing company to another and was especially anxious to retain "It Feels So Good" for Georgia Music. Williams obtained a special transfer document, signed in the presence of the U.S. vice consul in London, complete with formal embassy seal and ribbons. Other titles were similarly transferred in December 1939. Although the document was signed by the vice consul, James E. Callahan, it was a rubber-stamp job over a \$2.00 fee stamp.

The easy relations between Joe Davis and Spencer Williams can be seen from the comments at the end of Davis's letter, after the business has been concluded:

There isn't an awful lot more I can write you about, except that I would like to see someone over on the other side give Hitler an enema with some dynamite on it.

My children are feeling swell and everything is going along nicely.

P.S. Many thanks for the swell picture you sent me. You sure have the recipe for keeping young, or is it your wife that has the recipe for keeping you young.

P.P.S. Please have the attached releases notarized and I will refund costs.

However, Davis's comments about his family were more than just chitchat. His wife had died on June 3, and Davis clearly remained much concerned about the effect upon his daughters. He assured Spencer Williams, who would have known about this, that they were bearing up well.

One interesting batch of tunes that he transferred from Joe Davis, Inc., to Georgia Music Corp., three months prior to the sale of the former, included five titles from Walter Davis's April 1936 recording session. Among them were several compelling titles—"I Think You Need a Shot," "Fallin' Rain," and "Just Wondering"—the last coupling became one of Davis's top sellers for Bluebird. Most intriguing was "I Don't Know" by Lane Hardin, copyrighted initially in 1936. It wasn't from the 1936 Walter Davis session and the only known Lane Hardin Bluebird session was

from July 1935, which produced just two titles, neither of them being “I Don’t Know.”

If the year ended significantly for Davis, in that he sold part of his “empire,” he continued looking patently ahead. On November 16, 1939, he signed budding writer/pianist Erskine Butterfield to a renewable one-year contract giving Davis first option on all songs. Planning a *Fats Waller Piano Folio* he needed photographs. For \$35.00, Timme Rosenkrantz granted permission for Joe Davis to use certain Fats Waller photographs from the December 1939 edition of *Swing Music* magazine.

## Chapter Four

# How Joe Davis Did Business

For Joe Davis the 1940s opened the same way that the 1930s closed, but within two years events were to take place that completely redirected his business and personal life. The music publisher of the past quarter century would also become one of the spirited minor independent record producers—indeed, one of the very first of significance. For the next twenty-five years Davis wandered in and out of record production—never leaving music publishing entirely. Ultimately, his record companies indirectly led Davis to sell off much of his music business in later years.

Having shed much of his publishing interests via the sale of Joe Davis, Inc., in 1939, Davis continued adding to Georgia Music's collection from his trusted writers. Fats Waller wrote "Happy Feeling" and its sheet music carried forty-eight small photographs of Fats on the front, in many varied mugging poses. With Andy Razaf he wrote "Stayin' at Home," "A Hopeless Love Affair," "Jealous of Me," and "Find Out What They Like (And How They Like It)," which Betty Thornton recorded for Davis in 1946. With J. C. Johnson, the energetic and creative Waller wrote "How Ya Baby," "What Will I Do in the Morning," and "How Can I with You in My Heart." Andy Razaf chipped in with a number of titles, including two that were recorded by Betty Thornton in 1946: "The Dentist Song" and "If You Can't Control Your Man." Willie "The Lion" Smith wrote "Lament of the Lioness," while the recently signed Erskine Butterfield added "Chocolate" and "Monday's Wash," which he soon recorded for Decca. Ollie Shepard wrote "Chattanooga Blues" and informed Davis that his American Federation of Musicians membership now resided with Local 802, New York City. The handwritten lead sheet for "Chattanooga Blues" shows the cowriter as Ruth Brewer, but the contract showed that any royalty would be paid to Perry Bradford, a shrewd operator since the 1920s.

Always looking at new trends in black popular music, Davis added several titles from up-and-coming jump blues bandleader Louis Jordan. Also referred to as R'n'B, Jordan's Tympani Five defined the genre with its piano,

string bass, and drums driven forward by Jordan's enthusiastic vocals and booting sax along with a trumpet player. The band's repertoire featured a mix of blues, novelty songs, and some ballads. Louis Jordan (though every Joe Davis document shows him as Louie) contributed "Honey in the Bee Ball" in collaboration with J. Mayo Williams; perhaps something came of Andy Razaf's attempt to help Zilner Randolph after all. Davis published "Sing-Song Swing" with a photograph of Ella Fitzgerald, who "introduced" the tune. Because Ella's "A Tisket A Tasket" sold almost a quarter of a million records for Decca in 1938, Davis saw this shrewd "introduction" as an excellent plug for business.

Repeat deals with satisfied customers were important to Joe Davis and in March 1940 North Carolina millworker Dorsey Dixon wrote to Clarence Steinberg, Davis's general manager, about selling a further set of hill-billy tunes for \$90.00. Dixon must have run the contract by a local lawyer, who wrote: "With the elimination of lines four, five and six of the second page of the Release I see no objection to signing same. By those lines, I would be obligated to give to Mr. Joseph M. Davis ALL musical compositions I may write in the future. Whereas, now I am but conveying all title and rights in the NINE compositions on page one of the Release." Dixon's lawyer also wrote: "Will you kindly have new Release form prepared with those lines deleted, attach a Cashier's Check for \$90.00 to same, and send Release and check to the Farmers Bank & Trust Co. with instructions to turn check over to me upon properly signing and executing the said Release before a Notary Public." Various other writers, among them Otis Blackwell and Danny Taylor in the mid-1950s, would rue the fact that they hadn't checked the small print very closely!

In late March or early April Decca's Dave Kapp wrote Joe Davis from the Rice Hotel in Houston, Texas. According to *Downbeat* for May 1940 Kapp had traveled there in a failed attempt to record the legendary local jazz pianist Peck Kelley, who didn't step into a studio until 1957. Nonetheless, Kapp recorded other artists ("I've only made 45 numbers to date"), some of whom used Davis's songs:

I got a few good records on some of your songs. The Shelton Bros did a fine job on "Maple On The Hill"—They're crazy about the tune and expect to do it quite a bit down here. Nothing too exciting otherwise—am anxious to be home.

As ever,  
Dave

In a friendly return letter Davis thanked Kapp for “Maple on the Hill,” and went on to write: “The song that you liked best of all was ‘My Red River Valley Home’ and I am wondering whether you will have a chance to get this in before you get through recording. Ruth, Bert and I are spending the evening together tonight, and we are seeing a murder mystery entitled *The Lady In Retirement*.” Ruth was Mrs. Dave Kapp, and Bert was Dave and Jack Kapp’s sister, Bertha.

The friendly atmosphere was partly explained in a *Downbeat* entry for July 1, 1940, under its TIED-NOTES column: “Joe Davis married Bert Kapp sister of Decca’s prexy Jack Kapp. New York. June 12th 1940.” Davis’s first wife had been named Bertha (née Thalheimer) and shortly before her death they purchased a lakeshore property on Lake Waramaug in eastern Connecticut, which became their weekend retreat and occasional summer home.

As it happened, the marriage to Bertha Kapp provided a useful business link as well. The new Mrs. Davis continued her songwriting career and assumed a large number of pseudonyms, such as Howard Richards and Billy Collins, as well as Rinky Scott Jones (at times), Phoebe Snow, Glenn Gibson (at times), and Adrienne Garblik. She probably viewed the use of so many male names as an asset at that time. She also used her own names of Bert Kapp and Bert Davis—but never Bertha.

Although his marriage cemented an existing useful business link, Davis clearly went out of his way not to rely on the Kapp brothers in order to gain a business advantage. This self-made man in no way counted upon them any more than before his marriage into the family. Davis, in fact, went out of his way to deal with Frank Walker or Jack Robbins and, quite frankly, only turned to the Kapps when he thought that the deal could profit them all.

Despite the fact that Decca recorded some of his best tunes in the 1940s, they had been well tested and received in the marketplace before he approached the Kapp brothers. Davis grew especially close to Dave Kapp, but both brothers had the reputation for spotting and shaping a hit tune. In Jack’s studio a sign asking, “Where’s the melody?” hung round the neck of a cigar-store Indian. This question would undoubtedly have pleased big-band music critic and acknowledged “Melody Man” George T. Simon, who once commented that “creative musicians recording in Decca’s small, stuffy studio were intimidated by [the] sign” (George Simon, *Simon Says: The Styles and Sounds of the Swing Era* [New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1971]).

During the summer of 1940 one event foreshadowed a larger and more costly one in 1947–1948 regarding St. Louis-based blues pianist Walter Davis. RCA wrote to Joe Davis about copyrights held on three titles by Luther Baucom (mandolinist and a founding member of the Three Tobacco Tags, who recorded and broadcast extensively through the 1930s and into 1940s), among them “Rambling Freight Train Blues.” Two of the titles had been assigned to Joe Davis in 1936 and the third to Georgia Music in 1937, but RCA learned of Baucom’s claim that he was “the composer and sole owner.” RCA asked Davis “to investigate these numbers at once and let [us] know promptly whether you are prepared to relinquish your claim to these compositions and refund to us the royalty so that we may attempt to make some sort of settlement to the claimant if it is possible at this late date to do so.” The outcome of this query isn’t on file, but music publishing history is full of questioned ownership and pending litigation.

If Davis’s own file information for 1940 seems unusually biased toward country music, the *New York Enquirer* for June 10 placed it in a clearer perspective: “Joe Davis, head of Georgia Music Corp., has completed plans to promote ‘The Lion And The Mouse,’ which Bob Chester and his band will feature during his CBS broadcast. In fact, Bob will introduce the song next Friday night at 11 p.m. via CBS chain.” Davis clearly continued plying his (and the nation’s) most lucrative avenue of business, namely the dance bands, quite often by plugging his tunes through the more popular of the jazz/swing bands.

J. M. Ethridge’s piece for the *Atlanta Journal* Sunday Magazine for July 7, 1940, expressed delight that the city’s major thoroughfare had been selected by

three famous song writers, even if they all happened to be “Yankees.” But, “foreigners” or not, they have turned out a perky little tune. The trio of composers—Andy Razaf, Margaret Bonds, and Joe Davis[—]have named their creation simply “Peach Tree Street” . . . It’s catchy, swingy. You can get the number on several records, incidentally, for it’s been recorded by at least three favorite bands. Woody Herman, personable leader of the “Band That Plays the Blues,” has a swell version on Decca, as has Milt Herth, whose organ band played Atlanta not many weeks ago. Louis “Satcho” Armstrong waxed “Peachtree Street” for Okeh.

The writer undoubtedly opted for a marked degree of poetic license or had been fed a fine line from Joe Davis as the nearest that Louis came on

disc in 1940 to “Peachtree Street” was “Perdido Street Blues,” and that for Decca. Nonetheless, the writer of the article demonstrated a nice sense of humor. Having pointed out that the name should have been “Peachtree Street,” he also further noted that the lyricist (Razaf) had clearly not visited the city as he says that “Peachtree was the street he never felt afraid on.” “Obviously,” wrote J. M. Ethridge, “he’s never bucked 5 o’clock traffic there.” Asked how he conceived the idea of writing about this street, Davis said he didn’t remember but “perhaps it was . . . Damon Runyan’s reports of the pretty girls down there.”

The year ended with Davis’s late 1939 signing of Erskine Butterfield appearing more shrewd and savvy by the month. The contract—renewed in September 1940—gained extensive coverage in the *New York Amsterdam News*. Butterfield performed twice a week over WOR; Tuesday at 8:30 P.M. and Saturday at 10:45 A.M., according to his personal advertising card, which also announced that his latest songs appeared on Decca Records. Between 1940 and 1942 Butterfield recorded just over forty titles, all for Decca. The *New York Amsterdam News* for the Christmas week of 1940 carried a photograph and lengthy write-up in its theater section: “Radio’s newest star—Erskine Butterfield—‘Singing Vagabond of the Keys’ appears as star of the 125th Street Apollo Theatre Xmas Revue,” with Lucky Millinder’s band.

In the early 1940s Joe Davis’s hottest property undoubtedly remained Erskine Butterfield and Davis added many piano pieces like “Blackberry Jam” and even collaborated with him (as Leslie Beacon) on the jivey “Mary Had a Little Jam.” Perhaps in honor of the idea of the Beacon Record Company, Butterfield wrote “Lighthouse” for Davis. The March 1, 1941, *Chicago Defender*, under the caption, “Meet Radio’s Unknown,” displayed a picture of Butterfield’s mixed-race combo, with Jimmy Lytell on clarinet and an all-white rhythm. That same week the Apollo Theater billed Les Hite and blues singer *Teabone’ Walker’* (*sic*) as its major attraction.

The *Orchestra World* for February 1941 carried an article by Eve Ross headed “Piano: Analyzing Butterfield Boogie-Woogie” on page 28. She extracts and analyzes three sections from “Monday’s Wash,” recorded that month for Decca with an augmented combo including Yank Lawson and Jerry Jerome. In a very perceptive article, Ms. Ross points out that Butterfield “is the only Negro pianist we know of on the air with an entire radio show of white folk built round him. He’s on WOR-M[utual] B[roadcasting] S[ystem] Fridays at 11:15 p.m.” She pointed out that Butterfield “started his professional career at the Clarence Williams publishing offices when he

tried to sell Williams a song. Williams never bought or published that song, but he gave Erskine a job on the spot—as a pianist. He taught him to play the blues.” Butterfield progressed to become Williams’s professional manager but eventually left for a solo career, often featuring small groups until he recorded for Joe Davis.

The “Monday’s Wash” recording session for Butterfield was written up in the March 8 *Chicago Defender* under the heading “Butterfield Records One More Sender,” referring actually to “Blackberry Jam.” It mentioned that “on his network sessions as well as in his recording dates Butterfield is backed up by the pick of musicians, who are chosen from many orks [orchestras] and radio stations.” In language closer to that of *The Billboard*, the *Daily Mirror* for the same date wrote: “Shades of Tin Pan Alley Cats! Have you heard Erskine Butterfield’s new Boogie Woogie Blues, titled ‘Blackberry Jam?’ It’s fresh off the press, right from the pen of Erskine himself. His waxing of it for Decca has Jack Kapp talking to himself.”

His biggest hit that year was probably “Foo-Gee,” recorded by Butterfield for Decca in July, but bought by Davis in February from Jack Palmer. By September, Dave Kapp wrote to Davis saying, “I am writing Jack [Kapp] today about the Ink Spots recording of ‘Foo-Gee.’ I am sure we will be able to get this in by them.” Within the month, on October 6, they recorded it for Decca as the first title in the session.

Naturally, Davis continued acquiring titles from other sources, including the ever-reliable and creative Fats Waller. He released a five-tune *Fats Waller’s Piano Antics* folio featuring “China Jumps,” “Sneakin’ Home,” “Palm Garden,” “Wand’rin’ Around,” and “Falling Castle.” Earlier in the year, James Hancock (a Davis pseudonym) had taken out a copyright to “Alberta Blues,” which appeared as an extremely rare cajun tune by Lawrence Walker, recorded for Bluebird January 18, 1935. If that seemed an unusual business angle for Joe Davis, September brought a \$100.00 lease of the Razaf-Waller collaboration, “The Joint Is Jumpin’,” via the Harry Fox Agency to Minoco Productions for a 16 mm film short with Fats Waller.

The song-plugging didn’t always run smoothly, of course. In October Rudy Vallee wrote Davis: “Frankly, I thought ‘Pleasant Dreams’ was pretty bad. However, for me to judge, I should have the lead sheets, and if you will send them to me, I will try to put it on one of the programs—mainly because I shall always think of you as one of the best friends I have ever had.” Despite his professional effort, the man who broke “S’posin’” for Davis failed to work his magic with “Pleasant Dreams.”



Many a man would have been glad of that last line of Vallee's for an epitaph. Although few such testaments appear among his business papers (Davis remained a very private man throughout his life), one piece of correspondence from March 1941 underscores the sensitive side to this apparently brash businessman. A member of the staff of the Danville High School in Illinois wrote Georgia Music with a dozen programs of the school's Moments Musical of 1941 and the comment: "We appreciate your kind cooperation by allowing us to print the words to 'SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY.' We hope that you will like the way we set it up on the back page." The teacher went into great detail of the dress in which each held up a "gilded letter (20 inches high) spelling out the title to the song, as they stand before our sixty piece band and sing this number to a NAUTICAL setting of the deck of a modern battleship."

To the man who soon published Dick Sanford-Jack Betzner's "The Heroes of Pearl Harbor," it must have done his patriotic heart proud! He wrote back immediately saying that "it would have been a great thrill for me to hear the song done and I sincerely regret that I was not there." Davis could have easily passed the letter to his secretary, or even Clarence Steinberg, to answer. But that's not how Joe Davis did business.

### ASCAP and BMI

For Davis, as for every music publisher involved, the major event of 1941 (until Pearl Harbor) was the ASCAP-Radio "war." The harmonious relationship of the 1920s slowly grew ever more acrimonious. By the early 1930s ASCAP began looking upon radio as the means of bolstering falling income from catastrophically reduced record and sheet music sales. The long-term contract mandating that ASCAP's 2 percent share of the revenue from sales of advertising time, which rose by 1936 to 5 percent, was due to expire on December 31, 1940. ASCAP ran its own promotional campaign, with its president Gene Buck writing to all advertisers that "music made radio."

Various parties with vested radio interests quickly took up the challenge. The refusal of the two major networks (NBC and CBS), together with many independent and network-affiliated stations, to accept a new ASCAP-directed license as of January 1, 1941, meant that no ASCAP tunes received airplay when the old contract expired. In preparation for this event, the radio industry started a rival—Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI).

ASCAP's history of high-minded attitudes to writers and members, let alone to radio, eventually led to capitulation and a reduction of their desired fee. Hard on the heels of this trauma ASCAP called a special meeting on February 20, 1941, to alter one of its rules with regard to distribution of receipts. This proposed change resonated with Davis and he exploded into action, sending duplicate—and very lengthy—telegrams all over the musical world, as well as to Thurman Arnold, assistant attorney general in charge of the Anti-Trust Division in Washington, D.C.

In a strongly worded, but highly cogent memorandum, Davis wrote:

As an ASCAP publisher-member of long standing, and as one who is deeply appreciative of your commendable efforts to eliminate certain abuses and evils charged by the government against the society's methods, conduct, and operations . . . I hereby vigorously protest and object especially to paragraph nine of the proposed consent decree submitted for approval to the ASCAP membership . . . While the proposed decree eliminates the long-existing evil of a self-perpetuating board of directors, the practical effect . . . will be a permanent establishment and perpetuation by judicial mandate of an equally grave abuse, namely the unfair basis for determining royalty distribution by the society to its membership, which will in no substantial manner differ from the method presently used.

Davis further complained that the new decree used words like “number, nature, character, prestige, popularity and vogue of such works [which] by reason of their elasticity and indefiniteness must readily lend themselves to the same abuses which have heretofore existed.” Davis requested a more equitable formula for determination of distribution of royalties, an issue with which he had long been unhappy in ASCAP. The organization's failure to assess the strength of the nascent BMI and the degree of resistance liable to be met from the radio industry fueled his growing resentment of ASCAP's self-perpetuating board of directors.

Mr. Arnold replied specifically to Davis's issue of paragraph nine in the case of *United States v. American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers* stating that this paragraph “represents an attempt to require a more equitable method of royalty distribution. The nature of the document necessarily requires the use of general language so that members of the society, if they so desire, may change the method of distribution from time to time.” Davis remained unimpressed. One wonders what Charles D. Polletti

(lieutenant-governor of New York State), Carson Robison, Ed Sullivan, and Walter Winchell—among other recipients of Davis's telegram—felt on the issue.

Joe Davis's final major act of 1941, apart from exercising his option to renew Erskine Butterfield's contract through November 17, 1943, changed the name of Georgia Music Corporation to Joe Davis Music Co., Inc. Anonymity simply didn't suit him. Their offices remained at 1619 Broadway, where they had been for some years, and he continued living in the Bronx.

Whether or not Danville High School's patriotic presentation shaped Davis's thinking along such lines, January 1942 saw a cowritten Andy Razaf-Joe Davis tune, "Three Cheers for Our President." Davis, ever cautious, wrote to the White House seeking formal permission to reproduce a photograph of President Roosevelt on the sheet music. Stephen Early, secretary to the president, wrote back that "although this office never gives formal permission for the use of the President's likeness, we are quite willing to leave the decision to your own judgment and discretion. Please be assured that the courtesy of your enquiry is appreciated."

The *New York Enquirer* for January 12, 1942, ran a headline, "Joe Davis Introduces 'Yankee Doodle Rainbow,'" which he hoped would catch the country's patriotic fervor. The song enjoyed only modest success, but by May he brought a new tune from James Cavanaugh, John Redmond, and Nat Simon—"The Watchman Fell Asleep." This seemingly innocuous purchase changed his life.

### Beacon and Petrillo

Davis took "The Watchman Fell Asleep" to Dave Kapp at Decca. Kapp liked it and assigned the tune to Woody Herman for a recording date. However, war in Southeast Asia meant the loss of shellac, mostly from India, which remained under direct threat of Japanese invasion. The War Production Board ordered a 70 percent cut in the nonmilitary use of shellac. With a stack of tunes already lined up for Herman to record, "The Watchman Fell Asleep" fell off his list. A determined Davis felt so strongly about the song's hit potential that he decided to issue the disc himself.

This bold act placed Davis among the very first major independent record producers. Indeed, nearly all other, small pre-World War II record producers failed to survive the wartime period; some, like Varsity, folded before the shellac restrictions. Most independents came onto the market

after the recording ban by the American Federation of Musicians in 1942–1943 (1942–1944 for some major labels). Once again Davis cemented his status as a pioneer.

But what to call his new record label? Having recently been using the pseudonym Leslie Beacon for some of his songs, he apparently decided to call it Beacon Records, with the name written across the beam from a lighthouse. The *New York Enquirer* for May 1, 1942, headlined “Jerry Wayne Waxes New Songs for Beacon Label.”

On January 1, 1943, the U.S. Patent Office granted registration of the trademark of Beacon Record Co. Their registration noted that the name “has been continuously used and applied to the said goods in the applicant’s business since about May 22, 1942.” The *New York Post* added that “Buffalo boy, handsome Jerry Wayne, who is heard five times weekly on WABC, has won the distinction of recording the first four sides on Joe Davis’s new BEACON RECORDS label.”

Jerry Wayne cut these four sides on May 4 with Van Alexander’s Orchestra but oddly, the initial coupling, for a June 1942 release, failed to include the tune for which Davis had started the company! Beacon 100 backed “Indiana Blues,” a tune Davis had written with the niece of trombonist J. C. Higginbotham, Irene Higginbotham, with a ballad, “This Will Be a Lonesome Summer (Without You Sweetheart),” which probably appealed to many GIs. “The Watchman Fell Asleep,” backed by Paul Denniker’s “Sweetheart Serenade,” originally scheduled for Beacon 101, finally went public in December 1942 on Beacon 108. Between Jerry Wayne’s releases came issues from three other Davis sessions, thus helping to solidify his status as a legitimate record company.

It’s unclear whether his own time on radio proved to him the importance of DJs or whether his location in the center of New York’s music, the Brill Building, sharpened his insight. Whatever the reasons, Davis decided to mail discs direct to DJs and sent mailers depicting scheduled releases direct to jukebox operators, and the positive response took him by surprise.

During every phase of his recording activity for his own labels, he never once lost faith with the power of DJs to “break out” a song, and aimed his marketing at distributors and jukebox operators. The significance of sales via the jukebox, however, impressed members of the American Federation of Musicians, and at their June 1942 convention in Dallas, the organization passed a resolution banning all members from accepting recording contracts after midnight on July 31, 1942.

The AFM feared that the country's approximately 225,000 jukeboxes (based on a 1939 estimate) could reach one-half million by the end of 1942. Their president, James C. Petrillo, decided that—in order to secure his members' livelihoods—he would institute a recording ban, and then a “tax” on jukebox plays, to be paid into AFM funds. The results of the ban proved momentous, but not as Petrillo had foreseen. Perhaps, in the long run, it assisted the musicians, as the post-ban boom in independent recording companies enabled far more musicians to record; albeit many of them nonunion, as smaller companies sought to cut costs at source. These moves, along with the shortage of shellac, signaled a sea change in the recording industry. (Robert Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890–1950* [Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003], contains more on this topic.)

By the time the AFM decided on the ban, the response to his mailers and DJ samples of the first Jerry Wayne Beacon release motivated Davis to cut four titles with the Bob Allen Orchestra. Allen, formerly a vocalist with the Hal Kemp Orchestra, recently began his own band, which Davis believed held commercial promise. This session included the Andy Razaf-Erskine Butterfield collaboration, “Keepin’ Out of Trouble,” Paul Deniker’s “Sweetheart Serenade” (which Jerry Wayne had already cut), and the best seller from the session, “The Air Raid Warden Song.”

The music scene was not only shifting, the shortage of shellac prompted this headline in the June 14, 1942, *New York Enquirer*: “Donate Old Records . . . let’s make this record campaign a record-breaker.” Every 78 rpm record collector has, at some time, paused to think on what was lost in these shellac recycling drives. Two weeks later the same paper ran a column headed “Joe Davis Has Long Shot via New Records” which ended on a most perceptive note: “It looks as though coin operators can’t get enough records to supply the demand and they welcome the opportunity to do business with Davis. It certainly looks as though Davis sprang his idea at the psychological moment, and as a result has hit a jackpot.”

Once news broke of the pending AFM ban, the recording situation looked poor for all companies, Davis’s among them. Nothing prevented release of titles recorded prior to August 1, 1942, so recording studios remained solidly booked in an effort to stockpile enough titles to weather the ban—although no one predicted it would last for so long. After the deadline passed the major companies began checking to see what remained unissued and many collectors’ items by artists as disparate as Fats Waller and Bob Wills surfaced for the first time.

Shortly before the "Petrillo Ban" took effect, Davis arranged two sessions at the close of July 1942 for black female singer Savannah Churchill and bandleader Buddy Clarke. Time was so short that Davis slated the Savannah Churchill session for 8.00 A.M. at Associated Studios at 151 West 46th Street. The Buddy Clarke session squeezed in at 4.00 P.M. on July 31, literally with hours to spare.

Savannah Churchill grew up singing in Brooklyn church choirs as a girl, but the tragic loss of her husband in a 1941 automobile accident necessitated her entry into the entertainment world as a singer and prompted a move to Atlantic City, New Jersey. Somehow she popped up on early 1942 Hollywood soundies featuring the Les Hite band, with titles such as "The Devil Sat Down and Cried." In September 1941, she participated in a two-week tour with the Edgar Hayes band through North Carolina and Georgia, and before that she had performed at the Crystal Caverns in Washington, D.C. Hite's soundies, however, possibly introduced her to Davis.

We'll never know what inspired Davis to select the fine Dixieland band that accompanied Savannah Churchill on her Beacon session. Davis chose the core of the excellent combo that backed Erskine Butterfield on his Decca releases; Jimmy Lytell on clarinet, Carmen Mastren on guitar, and Haig Stevens on bass. Perhaps Lytell brought in his old ex-Original Memphis Five buddy on piano, Frank Signorelli, who possibly suggested adding veteran drummer Chauncey Morehouse, with whom he had recorded in Frankie Trumbauer's orchestra. Then again, Morehouse had recorded with session trumpeter Russ Case in 1935, with Jimmy Lytell in 1937, and with Haig Stevens in 1940. Swinging trombonist Wilbur Schwichtenburg (as Will Bradley) had recorded back in 1935 with Russ Case. Irrespective of how they were assembled, Churchill performed very well with this small band, staffed with seasoned musicians who felt comfortable in the studio and often worked together. It was a band of high pedigree; small wonder that it worked so well for this singer with her fine voice.

While it is generally assumed that her career blossomed following Churchill's Capitol session with Benny Carter's orchestra, in fact her first hit came from this 1942 session for Joe Davis. All four releases from Davis's two July sessions reached the public shortly before the end of 1942. The Savannah Churchill releases, Beacon 104 and 106, were issued as by Jimmy Lytell and his All Star Seven, clearly indicating their jazz orientation. The earlier coupling, "Fat Meat Is Good Meat" and "He's the Commander-in-Chief of My Heart" (a nice pun on General Eisenhower's overall command),

swiftly sold, while “Fat Meat Is Good Meat” became the first hit for Davis. Lytell’s second coupling, “Two-Faced Man” and “Tell Me Your Blues and I Will Tell You Mine,” lagged only shortly behind.

The *New York Enquirer* of November 23, 1942, headlined “Beacon Record Has Hit Disk in Two-Faced Man.” It further reported that “Fat Meat Is Good Meat” sold over 100,000 and that “Two-Faced Man” racked up 25,000 sales in three weeks. Perhaps the paper’s earlier comment that coin operators’ inability to obtain enough discs carried some truth. “Fat Meat Is Good Meat,” the article continued was “a timely jump tune and ‘Two-Faced Man’ and ‘Tell Me Your Blues’ are excellent small band jazz by anyone’s standards.” Davis jumped on the bandwagon with an eye-catching mailer of white print leaping out of a purple background proclaiming “Fat Meat” as “a record that is fast becoming the national favorite. It’s hot—it’s sweet—it’s tender. No rationing.” The reverse of the mailer carried details of the two Bob Allen releases and the only Jerry Wayne and Buddy Clarke couplings to have been released by that date, under the cunning caption “a few other distinctive Beacon Records.” They were, of course, the only Beacon releases in the catalogue!

According to a review in *Look* magazine by Leonard Feather, “‘Tell Me Your Blues . . .’ plays free-style jazz with only a touch of studio stiffness.” It’s a pity that he didn’t mention that the flip showed none. Still, this review appeared above that of a Fats Waller disc, followed by reviews of Tommy Dorsey, Cab Calloway, and Glenn Miller, Davis can’t have been too hurt. By mid-December 1942 the *New York Enquirer* reported that “‘Fat Meat Is Good Meat,’ and ‘Two-Faced Man’ are showing signs of selling at least 200,000 records each.” By June 14, 1943, it reported that “‘Fat Meat’ . . . has gone well over the 200,000 mark.” These sales marked an excellent investment for the \$50.00 that Davis had paid Mrs. Churchill.

“He’s Commander-in-Chief of My Heart” was written by Joe Davis (as Leslie Beacon) and with Erskine Butterfield he authored “Two-Faced Man.” The other two tunes from the session were penned by Irene Higginbotham, an excellent writer that he was not about to lose. She eventually wrote many of his best-selling tunes in a partnership that lasted well into the 1950s.

Although Savannah Churchill went off to stardom elsewhere—as did so many of Davis’s artists—he always kept a check on her movements. A *Chicago Defender* cutting from June 16, 1945, reported that she appeared at the Regal Theater “boosting Chicago’s sweater and nylon trade. Get it?” If you don’t, just look at any period photograph of her. Another reviewer,



describing her at a 1942 Apollo show, called her “an established fave among colored and ofay devotees of jive and blues . . . a swell looker, with a nifty chassis, she dresses in a way to display those attributes, including not a few bits of business with the body.”

In 1947 she enjoyed her biggest hit, “I Want to Be Loved (But Only by You)” for Manor, backed by a vocal group. For that year only Louis Jordan and Julia Lee received more chart success, but the crossover hit it deserved simply eluded her. Never daunted, Davis quickly moved back in the market. Early in 1948 he reissued her Beacon releases (this time on his Celebrity label), cross-coupling “Fat Meat Is Good Meat” and “Tell Me Your Blues.” Savannah Churchill gained considerable fame in the early 1950s, even appearing at the London Palladium. But her career was effectively terminated in 1956 in the most bizarre circumstances, when a drunk fell from a balcony directly on top of her as she exited her dressing room, leaving her seriously and permanently injured. She died, all but unnoticed, in 1974.

Four titles by Buddy Clarke and his Orchestra—also recorded on July 31, 1942—remained in the shadows largely because of the 1942 Savannah Churchill releases. Three of these were written by Leslie Beacon (Joe Davis); two of them—most notably “Sweet Dreams”—sung by Joan Brooks. Happy Jim Parsons, the name used by veteran vocalist Irving Kaufman, and the non-Davis-penned tune, “Why Is My Little Red Head Blue,” with its 1920s punning, certainly made the singer feel quite at home. Once again Davis appears to be looking after his old buddies with Kaufman receiving a generous \$50.00 fee for only two titles. Buddy Clarke, a bandleader for many years in East Coast hotel resorts, enjoyed an extended engagement at Montreal’s Mount Royal Hotel, suggesting that this contact harkened back to the Ajax days in the early 1920s. Buddy Clarke, whose real name was Kreisberg, is not to be confused with bandleader Buddy Clark (no “e”), whose real name was Goldberg.

*Billboard* reviewed Beacon 105, which coupled “Sweet Dreams” with “Why Is My Little Red Head Blue,” and rated it “A favorite at the New York after-dark spots, Joe Davis again scores for his new record label in bringing Buddy Clarke to the waxes for the first time.” The same magazine’s “Talent and Tunes” corner mentioned Savannah Churchill’s “Fat Meat Is Good Meat,” accompanied by an all-star jazz combo including Will Bradley. The reviewer further suggested that the song had “plenty of repeating power.”

Late in 1942 Davis mailed out one of his occasional fliers headed (with a photograph of himself):



### Beacon Speakin' LET'S GET ACQUAINTED!

Just a few months ago I announced my first release of Beacon Records. Being a novice in the manufacturing end of the record business, I realized that I had quite a task ahead of me, considering the curtailment of shellac by the Government and other obstacles brought about by existing conditions. I set out with the idea of releasing for the present, one double-faced ten inch record a month, and I set the retail price at 50 cents, because I knew my cost of production would be far greater than that of the other companies. By issuing one record a month, I felt that I could concentrate on the exploitation of the songs recorded and at the same time fully supply the demand.

Beacon Records are made of the finest materials. The tone quality is superb and compares favorably with that of the other companies. I am endeavoring to bring out new artists and most of all, I am trying to record songs that are different and that have not been recorded for any other company.

Aimed at distributors (it ends with a wholesale price—exclusive of tax—of 30 cents a record with prepaid shipping costs), this remarkably honest broadside is a low-key assessment of how he came to be in the record business and what he was trying to achieve.

It's rather glib to suggest that he tried to record songs that had not been recorded for "any other company" simply because he was in the business of plugging his own. But this underscores why he founded Beacon. Davis wanted to expose new artists because so many others were already signed up, which also helps explain Irving Kaufman's pseudonym. Nonetheless, he did seek out genuine talent and clearly displayed an ear for finding it. Many female singers sought attention in the early 1940s but very few achieved the success enjoyed by Savannah Churchill; and who knows how the rock 'n' roll era would have treated her, had fate not dealt with her so dismissively.

Fitting in two recording sessions just hours prior to the AFM ban enabled Davis to release new material during the latter half of 1942, but the year slid away with no end of the ban in sight. A stubborn James Petrillo was clearly determined to fight for a considerable time. Davis must have thought very carefully about what to do and eventually dreamed-up one of the more imaginative loopholes in the AFM case.

The AFM had never accepted the harmonica as a bona fide musical instrument so Davis decided to use a harmonica group behind a singer,

with harmonicas pitched at different levels to act as a small accompanying band. Davis contacted Frank C. Andriello of the Polka Dots and arranged a session for December 23 at 4.00 P.M. at Associated Studios, where he had recorded previously. The four harmonica players—Frank Andriello, Hy Dolber, Ralph Files, and Michael Chimes—each received \$30.00 for the four-tune session. Artells Dickson (billed as Art Dickson) cut the highly topical titles “She Gave Her Heart to a Soldier Boy” and “The Man of the Hour, General Eisenhower.” The latter came from the same pens (Cavanaugh, Redmond, and Simon) as “The Watchman Fell Asleep.”

The other two titles, “20-99 Blues” and “Cold Winter Papa,” by another black female artist, Dolores Brown, cost Davis only \$25.00. Of the two titles she sang with the Polka Dots, and despite the forced lyrics of “20-99 Blues,” the accompanying group manages quite effectively to blow up a reasonable backing. The lead soloist certainly wasn’t a Sonny Boy Williamson, but he acquits himself very well in what must have been, at best, a most unusual situation for him.

Brown was not, however, a complete unknown. She debuted on disc with Erskine Hawkins in October 1939, recording with his band for more than a year, during which time she recorded one of Davis’s biggest hit tunes, “S’posin.” Perhaps this was why Davis chose her in December 1942, although she lived in nearby Brooklyn at the time. The following year found her singing with the Don Redman Orchestra, which opened at the Zanzibar on 50th and Broadway, and recorded with them for V-Disc on November 12. By April 1948 she reopened Spider Kelly’s in Philadelphia with the Al Russell Trio.

Presumably this Polka Dots session closed out 1942 for Joe Davis, who must have wondered why he jumped into the recording field, just as almost everyone else was quitting it. Billie Hayes and Beverley White each recorded four titles, all of which were released on Beacon. In all probability they were recorded early in 1943 but the possibility remains that some might have been cut in 1942. Unfortunately, file information for both sessions is absent from Davis’s papers.

The Library of Congress sent Beacon Records various “notices of use,” which presumably meant that particular songs had been recorded or were about to be recorded, most notably those for Savannah Churchill from July 24, 1942. The recording session occurred four days later. A Library of Congress entry exists for February 25, 1943, noting four titles: “20-99 Blues,” “Cold Winter Papa,” “Black Out Blues” (recorded by Hayes), and “My Baby Comes First with Me” (recorded by White). The first two titles,

recorded in December 1942 by Dolores Brown, were followed by the other two, probably in January or February 1943. Others from the Hayes and White sessions were not reported to the Library of Congress until March, or in the case of Billie Hayes's "Man Shortage Blues," until July 1943.

### Boogie Woogie on a Saturday Night

The new year dawned with some welcome publicity for Davis. *The Billboard* for January 30, 1943, pointed out that he was "selling almost strictly to operators and was interested primarily in plugging his own tunes." Around the same time the *New York Times* proved rather more accommodating: "A new company catering to the immense appetite for popular music has turned up . . . Their quality is better than some of the other newcomers—both as to material used in the composition of the disk and as to the musicians and their playing." The *New York Times* further mentioned both Jimmy Lytell's All Star Seven and reviewed the Dolores Brown and Art Dickson records. Even *The Billboard* (January 30, 1943) noted that the Polka Dots "should make familiar hearing for many radio listeners," no doubt why Davis used them.

While Davis's new projects gathered pace he remained heavily involved in ongoing business. A Fats Waller royalty statement dated February 1943 showed \$410.58 due, although some \$225.00 had been made available on seven previous occasions (two payments of \$100.00, the rest of \$5.00), once by wire and once in cash. Waller's greatest income came from mechanical royalties on "My Mamacita" and "Old Grand Dad" and from his *Piano Antics* folio, which sold 673 copies.

Erskine Butterfield collected quite generous royalties from July 1941 to mid-February 1943 during which he received \$1,023.44, mostly from royalties on "Foo-Gee" from Decca and RCA. The latter refers to the version cut at the first session of Florida-based Doc Wheeler and his Sunset Orchestra, which contained at least two members of the deservedly famous Jenkins Orphanage orchestras out of Charleston, South Carolina (one of them being trumpeter Cat Anderson). The band's guitarist Leroy Kirkland and Sammy ("The Man") Taylor on tenor sax remained involved with both Davis and the New York music scene in the 1950s.

The continuing AFM recording ban posed ongoing problems for a small company interested in issuing new material. Purchasing existing masters provided one way out, which Davis did in March 1943, from the Record

Syndicate Trust in Boston. The Scranton Record Co. in Scranton, Pennsylvania, also owned the original metalwork to certain recordings once belonging to now-liquidated companies. In an agreement between the two firms, Davis gained access to specific metalwork masters. From the Record Syndicate Trust's thirty-four-page catalogue he chose thirty-eight titles. Most of the titles were country, although he also picked a coupling by a brass band and four titles of Irish folk music. For these, Davis paid \$1,250.00.

What a shame that he ignored the entire last four pages, carefully listed as *RACE*. They comprise many of the rarest of all late Gennett Record Company recordings, mostly from the early 1930s. Just think, Davis could have issued records by such significant African American artists as the Dallas Jug Band, Ivy Smith, Scrapper Blackwell, Sally Sad, Texas Tommy, Georgia Tom, Big Boy Ben, the Jolly Jug Band, Alura Mack, Scare Crow, Jim Jam, Irene Scruggs, Teddy Moss, Bat The Humming Bird, the Harlem Wildcats, Eubie Blake, and the Scorpion Washboard Band. Some, but not all, were issued from Crown and Varsity.

Davis, however, purchased some nice hillbilly sides. Placing aside the more citybilly selection by Carson Robison and Frank Luther (four titles) and the McCravy Brothers (ten titles), Davis bought ten titles from Georgia fiddler Clayton McMichen as well as the Kentucky-bred Crockett Mountaineers (four titles) and two sides by Hale's Kentucky Mountaineers. A year or so later the odd Gennett race record did find its way onto Davis's new label but they are extremely rare.

The earliest sessions made in 1943 by Billie Hayes and Beverley White seemingly reaffirmed that Davis's early pattern of plugging black female singers remained in his blood. According to a promotional flier Beverley White's "Don't Stop Now" coupled with "My Baby Comes First with Me" (Beacon 111) was scheduled for release on April 20. The *New York Enquirer* for April 19 hailed it as "Beacon's Newest Record Hit." Davis's own flier ballyhooed "'Don't Stop Now,' the hottest song on records in years." If by "hot" Davis meant risqué, there was some truth to this claim.

Beverley White first recorded as a vocalist with the Claude Hopkins band of 1937, but here she teamed with Her Blues Chasers, about whom Davis supplied no identification. Years later, in an interview with Swedish researcher Bo Scherman, Al Casey identified himself on guitar and Willie "The Lion" Smith as the pianist. Improbable as that may seem at first, one must remember the long-standing business association between Casey and Davis. For further affirmation listen to the introduction to "Don't Stop

Now,” which comes directly from the Lion’s own tune, “Echoes of Spring.” The Beacon promotional flier lists Beverley White as a “New ‘Exclusive’ Beacon Record Artist,” a clear nod to the 1920s “race record” era.

Around the same time, Davis issued two similarly backward-looking discs. The first, a rather urbane hillbilly release by Carson Robison and Frank Luther (from Record Syndicate Trust’s masters), came out shortly after a comedy dialogue between Billy Murray and Monroe Silver, “Casey and Cohen in the Army.” Now those really *did* harken back twenty years.

Despite Davis’s exaggerated claim for “Don’t Stop Now,” it received favorable reviews. The *New York Enquirer* for May 8 called it “hot from Harlem . . . a definite sleeper . . . There should be no stopping the song in phono circles since the appeal of the ditty had gotten beyond the race locations.” *The Billboard* for the same date reported: “The present Petrillo freeze on the major recording studios is also instrumental in forcing to the top of the heap some material that might ordinarily be lost in the shuffle . . . ‘Don’t Stop Now’ stands an excellent chance of remaining out in front for a long time to come.” Davis must have wondered whether his limited distribution could cope with what both publications hinted ought to be a crossover hit.

Beverley White’s second release, Beacon 112, coupled a slightly risqué “Hot Bread” with “If Things Don’t Get Better, I’m Gonna Make a Change,” a fine blues written by Ward Baker (yet another Joe Davis pseudonym) that received a Library of Congress (E324424) copyright on February 1, 1943. White’s chart ranking in 1943 was higher than such well-regarded artists as Lonnie Johnson, Big Boy Crudup, or the Golden Gate Quartet. Even legendary jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald sat two positions behind her (Big Al Pavlow, *The R & B Book* [Providence, RI: Music Publishing House, 1983], 14).

*The Billboard* for May 8, 1943, stated that a Billie Hayes session had been held in April, an event that Davis marked with a new Beacon series, presumably specifically for race releases. Billie Hayes’s releases inaugurated the 5000 series: “Man Shortage Blues” and “I Can’t Get Enough” on Beacon 5001, while Beacon 5002 contained “Blackout Blues” and “You Ain’t Had No Blues.” “Leslie Beacon” wrote both “Man Shortage Blues” and “Blackout Blues,” continuing Davis’s preoccupation with wartime themes. “I Can’t Get Enough,” a rather standard double-entendre blues, came from the pen of Wesley Wilson but, perhaps most intriguing of all, “You Ain’t Had No Blues” was written by Lil Armstrong. The format of every song strongly recalls the 1920s. Moreover the uncredited accompanying pianist

sounds right for a performance from twenty years earlier. Because it is one of her songs, and given her contemporary session work with Decca, it is tempting to wonder if Lil Armstrong might be the pianist.

Aurally, however, it is more likely one of the pianists that Davis used on sessions from the early 1920s, such as Porter Grainger or Cliff Jackson. Grainger continued writing songs for Davis into the 1940s and recorded for him as the organist with a gospel group in 1945. Cliff Jackson had married Maxine Sullivan and a year or so later Davis cut a session with her. Could the mystery pianist—named “Peter Pan” on the record label—have been Davis himself? Davis was clearly having fun at someone’s expense (particularly future discographers and biographers), so we will probably never know this fine pianist’s true identity.

Within several weeks after Billie Hayes’s second release, Davis managed to obtain a single plug in the New York *Amsterdam News* of July 10, 1943, with a smiling photograph of her under a caption reading “She Sings the Blues.” Once again it sounds as if Davis wrote his own copy: “Billie Hayes, one of the newer blues singers who brings back memories of the great Bessie Smith blues era, rose suddenly from obscurity to national prominence recently when her first recording, ‘Man Shortage Blues,’ was released on the new Beacon label. Billie’s tale of woe about the wartime lack of manpower is proving a big success on thousands of juke boxes.”

“National prominence” and her appearance on “thousands of juke boxes” seems wishful thinking, and a harkening back to the “great Bessie Smith blues era” must surely be Davis’s own nostalgia trip. Given its rather modest sales, relatively few record-buying blacks of the mid-1940s supported this rather nostalgic performance. Nonetheless, Davis understood and appreciated the importance of such publicity, the cost of which was inexpensive versus the potential return.

June 1943, the month of Hayes’s second Beacon release, also marked the month in which Davis recorded his new piano “find,” Deryck Sampson. Contracts signed during May with the seventeen-year-old Sampson, by his guardian, Ethlyn L. Sampson, who was probably his father Lester Sampson, called for first refusal of any songs written by young Deryck A. Sampson. On June 10, 1943, Davis took Sampson into the Empire Studios at 480 Lexington Avenue and cut four 12-inch discs.

Released as Beacon 1 and Beacon 2 they remained the only 12-inch issues in the catalogue. All four sides are more than competent boogie items, which came from a slender, bespectacled lad who looked more of an academic than the big, much more physically imposing, boogie men

like Pete Johnson, Albert Ammons, and Meade Lux Lewis. Though not in their class, Sampson held his own with the general run of contemporary boogie-woogie pianists with “Boogie in C” standing as the strongest performance. “Boogie Express,” “Boogie in C,” and “Blues Boogie” are credited to Sampson, while “Hen House Boogie” bears the stamp of Joe Davis, as Emporia “Lefty” Scott, one of his more flamboyant pseudonyms.

In June 1943 Davis attracted further publicity following a bold business decision. As the *New York Enquirer* reported it, in 1916 Joe Davis borrowed \$50.00 from his father and rented desk space on West 45th Street but now he had “purchased an entire building on 51st, west of Broadway”; 331 West 51st became his new base and bandleader and composer Erskine Butterfield even wrote a tune with that title.

In April 1943, Butterfield, gigging in Minneapolis, reported to Davis that “all the radio men have been in. They have record[s] of ‘Fat Meat.’ They all like it and talk like they broadcast it.” About that time he wrote Davis that he had “finally found a piano I can use in the afternoon . . . I think you’ll find ‘Minuet’ very interesting. I’ll have ‘Don’t Stop Now’ on the air Thursday from the Dome at 11 p.m.,” adding a footnote that he would “leave ‘Humoresque’ till last—it’s tough.”

The following month he wrote another letter to Davis, commenting that he was “surprised to get ‘Fantasy in Blues,’” which Davis had bought from him the pervious month. Butterfield further noted that he had “read in the Minn[eapolis] magazine that the Lion is in Detroit.” Willie “The Lion” Smith, a longtime Davis songwriter-pianist on Beverley White’s session, was Butterfield’s idol. By July, Butterfield and his wife relocated to Sioux City, Iowa, and he added a passing note in a letter to Davis that Louis Armstrong was in town. “I suppose I’ll see him,” he mused. “If I do, I have an extra copy of ‘Don’t Stop Now’ I’ll give him for you.” Davis wrote him a long return letter, enclosing a few more tunes for Butterfield to look over with radio airplay in mind. He pointed out that Butterfield’s folio of tunes was “in work” and he had “already received proofs on three numbers.” Davis, obviously busy with his new label, presciently wrote that “the record business has kept me on the hop. It’s a terrific business but unfortunately I cannot get near as much records as I can use but nevertheless I feel that I will have a wonderful established business by the time the war is over.”

World War II preoccupied most people during the summer of 1943 and the year-old AFM recording ban showed no sign of folding. In his letter to Erskine Butterfield, Davis rued the fact that he remained unable to record as much as he wished. The June issue of *Orchestra World*, with perhaps



a touch of envy, observed that Davis was “one of the few who had nerve enough to start his own waxworks . . . Many a bandleader has wanted to do likewise, but only Tommy Dorsey ever really got close . . . [but] succumbed to Victor’s plea for a better deal—and bigger money.”

During the summer of 1943, Davis earned unexpected income from the hillbilly items from his Record Syndicate Trust deal. Independent record producer Moe Asch unwittingly issued nine of the titles to which Davis had bought rights, mostly in an album entitled “Frontier Ballads.” Asch paid Davis a royalty on sales, which Davis then used to offset any potential loss on his purchase from the Record Syndicate Trust. For two-thirds of the titles he used, Asch was not permitted to use the name of the original artists. This restriction allowed Davis to release the bulk of the titles at various times on his own labels, most in a 3500 series. For some reason he never issued two of the Crockett Mountaineers titles that Asch had used: “Cripple Creek” and “Bile Dem Cabbage Down.” One title by Clayton McMichen, “Ida Red,” which Asch had used in his three-78 album, was also released by Davis in his own McMichen three-78 album, DA-19.

Davis bought a further four titles—negro spirituals by Jules Bledsoe with organ—in August from Record Syndicate Trust. Davis frequently published such music during the 1930s and the Trust’s catalogue included six titles by Bledsoe (a baritone), the precise origins for which are unclear. The label of his Joe Davis release claimed that the titles had been recorded in Europe; indeed they were French, probably from the Ultraphone masters listed in the Trust catalogue.

A poor farm boy from rural Texas, Jules Bledsoe rose to fame on Broadway in Ziegfeld’s *Show Boat* and was best known for his role as black dockworker “Joe” who sings “Old Man River.” Bledsoe appeared in the English version of *Show Boat* in London with Paul Robeson, and was in *Blackbirds of 1936*, from which Davis had published a Cahn/Chaplin tune. By 1942 he served as an announcer for AFRS shows, so Davis’s choice again seemed shrewd. Anyway, he thought enough of Bledsoe to pay \$125.00 for these four titles.

August 1943 found Davis heavily involved with recording his new piano star, Deryck Sampson, but in that month he also commenced recording a jivey vocal group, the 5 Red Caps, and a country blues singer from Florida, Gabriel Brown. The 5 Red Caps eventually became his most frequently recorded group, while he kept faith with Gabriel Brown for almost a decade, ever hopeful that one of his recordings would break well for him. Unfortunately, it never happened.



The *New York Enquirer* of August 9 pointed out, somewhat belatedly, that Sampson had cut twelve-inch discs for Beacon, but also mentioned that his first ten-inch Beacon releases would be on the market about September 1. These four sides ("Canal Street Boogie Woogie," "Chinese Boogie Woogie," "Kansas City Boogie Woogie," and "Homeless on the Range") were most probably cut at a session at Empire studios in July and neatly encapsulate the type of music he was recording; straightforward boogie items plus novelty boogies, most notably "Chinese Boogie Woogie."

The more gimmicky titles held obvious appeal, at least in terms of sales. A session on August 10 produced novelty tunes like "Flitin' [*sic*] the Mosquito" and "Hop Scotch," although "A Steady Time Special" (cut as an afterthought) is a pleasant mid-tempo boogie. The following month, Sampson returned to the studio to record four more Erskine Butterfield tunes—"Blackberry Jam," "Monday's Wash," "Chocolate," and "Boogie De Concerto"—all of which had been released by Decca from Butterfield's small combo sessions. For 40 cents Davis offered the sheet music to virtually every Deryck Sampson recording, and the back pages mentioned most of the remaining releases. Davis retained the identical format and photograph; merely altering title and color, which suddenly gave Deryck Sampson the patina of a major artist.

### The 5 Red Caps

Just as suddenly, a new group—the 5 Red Caps—appeared on the horizon for Davis. The *New York Enquirer* for August 2, 1943, related its version of how Davis discovered the group, and once again it looks suspiciously like he wrote his own copy. Under the heading "Five Red Caps' Are Beacon's New Record Stars," the report began with a eulogy of Davis's current activities: "Joe Davis . . . is doing terrific business in popular recordings. One has to see the extent of his new enterprise to realize the sensational progress he has made in a little over a year. His success in the field, however, is not a matter of luck. It is chiefly the result of being blessed with ideas and courage and the ability to recognize future greats while they still are in the embryonic stage."

It's difficult to disagree with this assessment. Davis certainly worked hard and displayed that uncanny gift of recognizing talent at an early date and his track record speaks for itself. The rest of the article, however, drifts into fantasy, and one senses that Davis has placed his tongue firmly in his

cheek before relating (or writing!) the story, which continued with: "Davis sleeps like other normal persons, but he never closes his business eye, even when he is resting up over the week-ends at his country home in Connecticut . . . This is how he ran into the 'Five Red Caps.' While he was rushing for a train recently he heard a bunch of Red Caps harmonizing on the station platform. Joe fancied their work and asked them to drop into his office one day. They did, gave another audition and left the place with a five-year contract to record exclusively for Beacon Records. Incidentally, Joe confidently feels that he has tied up one of the greatest combinations ever to be heard on records."

Davis, a firm believer in giving the public what they wanted to hear or read, nonetheless offered up some elements of fact. The 5 Red Caps signed a five-year contract, which within eighteen months caused great internal aggravation among group members. The article further stated that "their first releases on Beacon Records will be 'I'm the One,' coupled with 'I Made a Great Big Mistake,' and 'Tuscaloosa,' coupled with 'There's a Light on the Hill,'" suggesting that these titles had recently been, or would soon be, recorded. These titles appeared on Beacon 115 and Beacon 116, but with different pairings, with "I'm the One" backing "Tuscaloosa." A large flier that Davis prepared in order to launch these releases offered an August 16 shipping date, suggesting an early to mid-July recording date; although when he had Jack Dupree cover President Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, Davis demonstrated that he could issue a record within ten days or so of recording it.

Perhaps seeking a larger, crossover audience, Joe Davis's promotional material listed the 5 Red Caps releases as "Popular vocal-dance." The only releases he characterized as "Race Records" (Davis continued using the 1920s marketing term rather than the then-current euphemism "sepia") were by Billie Hayes and Dolores Brown. The Beverley White and Savannah Churchill releases were listed as "hot vocal-dance." Current discographical pigeonholes would distribute them quite differently, with nearly all of them falling under the very broad umbrella of "R&B."

The only available spirituals were two couplings by the Jubileers, under the direction of Richard Huey. The urban, white harmonica group, the Polka Dots, found one of their accompaniments listed under "Race" and the other (the Art Dickson coupling) listed under "Hill-Billy," along with the likes of Carson Robison and Frank Luther. With two boogie releases, a brass band disc, and a comedy dialogue, Davis was safely touching all bases.

The *Enquirer* article of August 2, 1943, even mentioned what were four titles to be recorded at the subsequent 5 Red Caps session: "No Fish Today," "Just for You," "Grand Central Station," and "I'm Going to Live My Life Alone." These were eventually released on Beacons 118 and 119 but before those were released, a session on August 24 produced a jivey "Mama Put Your Britches On," with a patriotic theme of women in the defense industry, and "Don't Fool with Me," released as Beacon 117. A third title, which had to wait until a fourth session on September 15 for its flip, "I Learned a Lesson I'll Never Forget," ultimately proved to be the hit for which Davis had long been waiting.

Despite the *Enquirer's* explanation of how the 5 Red Caps came to Davis's notice, it seems that he heard the group perform in the Enduro Club in Brooklyn, perhaps at the request of the group's leader, guitarist, and vocalist, Steve Gibson. After all, Davis had published one of Gibson's songs. As the "Four Toppers," Gibson and two other members of the 5 Red Caps (high tenor vocalist Jimmy Springs and bass player/vocalist Dave Patillo) appeared in films in Hollywood with Cee Pee Johnson's outfit in the late 1930s. By the time Davis encountered their act, Philadelphia pianist Romaine Brown and bass player Doles Dickens were group members, allowing Patillo to share lead vocals with Springs. Dickens previously anchored an excellent band assembled by Eddie Durham, which featured the legendary Dallas, Texas, reedman Buster Smith. However, Durham's band was undercut by the powerful New York Local 802 president and bandleader Fess Williams, who suggested the band was too smooth to appeal to a black audience.

"Smooth" suited Dickens and he easily slotted into the slick but rhythmic, up-tempo jive, and gentle ballads of the 5 Red Caps, a name Gibson choose to make themselves "sound black," like the Ink Spots. Some of their reissued material has been criticized as sounding too much like the Ink Spots, which the 5 Red Caps would have accepted as a fitting epitaph. Indeed, a 1943 review of their stage show at the State Theater noted this resemblance:

Red Caps' booking was on the strength of a moderate rep earned as a jukebox name, but the turn in its present shape isn't too strong . . . Act is in one respect patently fashioned after the Ink Spots, with emphasis laid on one of the men carrying the tenor solo lead on some numbers, as well as a talking bass, as done by the Spots' late Hoppy Jones . . . Pianist does a standing up routine, a la Maurice Rocco. Not a current pop

leader in the whole bunch, and the act calls for one. Men could also eliminate the prancing around the stage they do; it's not dancing and gets 'em nowhere.

Following these early July–August–September recordings and an ironing out of the initial contractual issues, the 5 Red Caps recorded frequently for Davis. The September 15 session, however, ended their recording for 1943, but by then Davis had quite sufficient titles in the can. Davis released these selections throughout late 1943 into early the following year.

August 1943 also marked the recording debut of blues singer-guitarist Gabriel Brown, an artist who remained with Davis throughout his professional recording career. Davis apparently liked the Empire Studios, so on August 26 he booked it to record four titles by Brown. Beacon's 5003 "You Ain't No Good" / "I Get Evil When My Love Comes Down" and 5004 "Going My Way" / "Black Jack Blues" may have come from an earlier, undocumented session or as a result of the afore-mentioned August 26 session.

Both were scheduled for release by December 1943 but by April 1944, only Beacon 5004 had been issued. This is but one example demonstrating that Davis's releases must not always be assumed to have been chronological. Furthermore, this situation became more complex and complicated in 1944–1945 when Davis added new labels to his roster. Some Davis releases ultimately appeared on more than one of his labels. "Going My Way," for example, appeared on Beacon 5004, Gennett 5004, and JD 5004.

Zora Neale Hurston, the eminent black writer and folklorist, may have supplied the connection between Gabriel Brown and Davis. In 1935 she accompanied Alan Lomax, then with the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress, along with Mary Elizabeth Barnicle, on a trip to south Georgia collecting black songs. Hurston instigated a move further south to Florida (and eventually on to the Bahamas), where she had undertaken fieldwork as an anthropology student. In Eatonville, Florida, they located and recorded Gabriel Brown (among others) for the Library of Congress. Some of the pieces that he recorded for the Library of Congress show a marked degree of sophistication, most notably "A Dream of Mine," although he also recorded some excellent blues, such as "Education Blues."

Nearly a decade later he appeared on some of Joe Davis's records but no one could explain precisely what had happened in the intervening years. Mack McCormick, in the late 1960s, researching in Florida, came across evidence that Gabriel Brown had drowned in a boating accident while fishing. It seemed we were never to know any more about his final years.

Material on file among Joe Davis's effects, however, not only fills in the enormous gaps in the known career of a fascinating bluesman, but fills them with startling detail.

Alan Lomax, trying to recall how Gabriel Brown came to be in New York, thought that Hurston had "used him in her earlier shows in Harlem as a singer and an actor [in] . . . a ballad opera based in a turpentine camp and brought the singers up to New York" (Bruce Bastin, *Red River Blues* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986], 331). Lomax certainly pointed in the right direction, but in fact Brown was already in the North by the time Hurston used him for this show. Presumably he appeared in *Polk County*, a "musical comedy" set in a sawmill, but she only began work on this early in 1944. By the time that his first disc debuted in April 1944, Brown perhaps once again came to her notice.

Joe Davis persevered with Gabriel Brown for almost a decade in an effort to make this Floridian's name as a bluesman, and an unrelentingly rural bluesman at that. Unlike so many of Davis's previous artists, who generally came to his attention through the ranks of the vaudeville stage or worked as professional musicians or entertainers, Brown's background remains singular both biographically and musically. He stands out as the only down-home blues singer whom Davis developed as an artist during his career in the music business.

Born in Orlando, Florida, in 1910, Brown graduated from Jones High School, attended Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College in Tallahassee, and also briefly studied medicine. From a poor family, he always took a variety of jobs on the side, including playing music.

Brown initially played Hawaiian guitar and sang with the Sun-To-Sun Singers. In 1934 he changed to what Davis calls "Spanish guitar," a term often used by southern bluesmen who tune their guitar to an open G chord (D-G-D-G-B-D) or an open A chord (E-A-E-A-C#-E), or any other open chord using the same intervals between strings instead of a standard guitar tuning. In fact, "Talking in Sebastopol" (*sic*) recorded by Lomax and Hurston in 1935 shows Brown using a metal or bottleneck slide to "tease" the strings in this open tuning. It's a technique heard on recordings by blues artists as diverse as Robert Johnson, Barbecue Bob, and Kokomo Arnold.

By 1934 he was accomplished enough to represent the state of Florida at the newly minted "National Folk Festival" in St. Louis. It's unclear who was responsible within the state for this remarkable action, although it may have resulted from Hurston's earlier involvement. In St. Louis Gabriel

Brown won the festival's first prize as the outstanding singer of folk songs and as a guitarist.

From 1935 to 1939 he worked with the Federal Arts Theater operated under the direction of Orson Welles, which is where he obtained his acting skills that Hurston apparently sought for her play in 1944. By 1939 he appeared on a Cincinnati radio station with Richard Huey in the "Sheep and Goats Club" program and also in the cast of the touring show *St. Louis Woman*. His connection with Richard Huey possibly brought him to the attention of Joe Davis, as Huey's sides were the first gospel recordings released by Davis in 1943.

Gabriel Brown also toured with shows for the U.S.O. and later worked for the Motor Transportation First Army Signal Corps at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, eventually becoming a permanent civil service employee. Brown settled in Asbury Park, New Jersey, where he began performing in local clubs before branching out to venues in other New Jersey coastal resorts. Perhaps his music appealed to local black residents because so many of them had strong family ties to the southeastern states.

In a short curriculum vitae that Davis prepared about Brown in an attempt to lease his material to major labels, Davis states that Brown's "vocal renditions of the blues are absolutely outstanding." There can be no denying their uniqueness even if one feels unable to support Davis the whole way. Gabriel Brown remains utterly his own man, certainly one of the more idiosyncratic bluesmen. Other than a hint of maybe Blind Boy Fuller, which is really probably no more than the standard East Coast blues style, his playing style and song lyrics remain quite distinctive. It's also noteworthy that his songs of 1952 are just as uncompromising as those of 1943.

However Davis came to know Gabriel Brown, Davis continued to record him into the early 1950s. In November 1944 Davis wrote to Brown offering a contract renewal stating that "this contract covers another year with your option and you will notice that for the second year I have again increased your recording fees." This offer strongly suggests that Brown had two year-long contracts. Although probably only one coupling from that session was released before December 1943, the initial recording session could date from November 1942.

In the fall of 1943 Davis released a disc recorded by a brother-and-sister cowboy duo, Chuck and Ellie Story, whom Davis may have heard broadcasting over New York City's WOV. These tepid performances marked their only recorded performance. In fairness Ellie was only fourteen when

she recorded and her brother only a few years older. These selections were among the few newly recorded hillbilly discs Davis released in the 1940s.

Always scouting for new material as well as new ways to advertise his company, Davis sent out a flier offering a two-month long songwriting contest that began November 1, 1943. Davis promised the winners a \$100.00 advance royalty, sheet music publication within sixty days, and the winning songs recorded on Beacon Records within ninety days of the close of the contest. All submitted manuscripts would be returned within twenty days of the close. Interestingly, one could enter "fox-trots, ballads, waltzes, novelties, hill billy songs, boogie woogie and blues, but NO WAR SONGS are to be entered." The contest seemed very fair but unfortunately we have no documentation as to the winners or winning titles.

In October Decca entered into an agreement with the Gennett Record company (or more accurately the Starr Piano Co., Inc., of Richmond, Indiana) that ultimately held far-reaching effects for Davis. The deal with Harry Gennett, who had run the company since 1922, called for Decca to pay Gennett ½ cent for each side of a record derived from Gennett matrices. This agreement resulted in a small number of interesting collectors' items from the 1920s Gennett catalogue once again becoming available. Several State Street Ramblers sides from 1928, like "Endurance Stomp," were released in Decca's race series. Decca also issued a few of white trumpeter Wingy Manone's records. Clearly the original Gennett pseudonym of "Barbecue Joe and his Hot Dogs" was assumed by Decca to mask a black band!

However, Gennett included a clause whereby he retained the right to cancel any release if it failed to earn a minimum royalty of \$25.00 per calendar year. Decca officials quite reasonably pointed out to Gennett in April 1944, they "would have had to order 2,500 recordings . . . [and] not having done so, the Agreement is cancelled." Decca paid the minimum royalty due to October 1944. By that time, however, Joe Davis moved into the picture, doubtless informed of Decca's move by one of his brothers-in-law.

Perhaps Decca initially agreed to the Gennett deal as a stopgap until their new recordings could hit the market. The smaller record companies quickly grew fed up with the intransigence of the majors in their attitude to the AFM ban. By September 1943, Decca decided to sign with the AFM to pay its 1 percent levy (literally a record tax that AFM used as its musicians' benevolent fund), thereby opening the floodgates.

Others, most notably Capitol, followed swiftly and Joe Davis signed with the AFM on November 3. This agreement allowed him to return to



business as usual. Whether or not he was aware of it, Davis's Beacon label had been chalking up mentions in the charts and ranked sixth after Decca, Victor, Capitol, Savoy, and Columbia. Along with Savoy, Beacon ranked as the other truly significant independent label of 1943.

Within three weeks of signing the agreement, he lined up a session with top-flight studio jazzmen to turn out four boogie items, with "Jingle Bells Boogie" clearly aimed at a Christmas market. At 10.00 A.M. on November 22, Will Bradley and his Boogie Woogie Boys, a star-studded combo that included two mainstays of the Bob Crosby Bobcats, trumpeter Billy Butterfield and bassist Bob Haggart (gloriously misspelled as Bub on Davis's publicity sheets), entered the studio. Butterfield (a Benny Goodman alumnus) had also performed with pianist Johnny Guarnieri in the small combo Gramercy Five sides as well as in the Artie Shaw band. The group's professionalism is underscored by the fact that in 2½ hours they recorded eight takes (seven of them complete) of four titles. "Lightning Boogie" and "Cryin' the Boogie Blues" went down in one, while "Sugar Hill Boogie Woogie" needed a third effort before Davis was satisfied. A close listen to all three takes of "Jingle Bells Boogie" demonstrates their ability and just how hard Butterfield swung.

The *Chicago Defender* of November 13, 1943, carried a large advertisement with a genial Fats Waller saying of Royal Crown Cola, "This cola tastes best!" Within a month, to everyone's horror, this big man died. Among his friends and legions of fans, his sudden death caused an immense shock and grief.

Waller's death, brought on by pneumonia, truly affected Joe Davis. His files contained two newspaper front pages of the funeral and a touching obituary in a third paper by Andy Razaf. The two-inch headline of the *New York Daily News* for December 21, 1943, defers to the war ("Yanks Win Arawe Airfield"), but Waller's obituary appeared on page 2. The top half of the paper otherwise held photographs of the funeral cortege and of a saddened Hazel Scott leaving after the service. *The People's Voice* (*The New Paper For The New Negro*) devoted its whole front page to this news under the caption "Fats Waller Buried." Andy Razaf's *Pittsburgh Courier* obituary on Christmas Day was dignified and personal, as one would expect from this writer. Davis must have been proud to be listed among Broadway music publishers "who encouraged and helped 'Fats' during his career."



## Chapter Five

# The Gennett Connection

In early 1944 Davis settled in to his new four-story premises at 331 West 51st. This large building—nicely trimmed with knotty pine walls and ceiling—effectively functioned as a record emporium. Davis used the ground floor for shipping, the second floor held the executive offices, while the third floor contained rehearsal studios, though no recording was done here. Given the sheer weight of a 78 rpm disc, the top floor surprisingly held Davis's record stock.

What turned out to be his busiest year for recording, and without doubt his most important musically, commenced very gently. Although he had material in hand anyway, it's instructive that Deryck Sampson, who had last recorded in September 1943, inaugurated 1944 with 2½ hours in the morning of February 9. Sampson cut six titles, five of them new; the sixth consisted of a shortened version of his twelve-inch "Boogie Express." The young pianist once again focused on the boogie genre with titles such as "Boogie Express," "Table Top Boogie," and the excellent Davis-written "Basin Street Boogie." Davis also directed the session toward popular or light classical music ("Boogie Serenade" with a nod toward Liszt's "Liebestraum" and "Boogie on the Volga"). Finally the session produced "Erin Go Boogie," possibly aiming at the upcoming St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

Davis's past preoccupation with pianists continued in March when *The Billboard* headlined "Beacon Building Second 'Fats' Waller." Kirby Walker, it stated, "baritone and pianist, will wax two sides Monday [presumably March 6, 1944] 'Sugar Lips' and 'Gabriel's Band.' Beacon intends to build him up as a second 'Fats' Waller." These plans came to naught—nothing was issued nor apparently recorded. However, the 5 Red Caps recorded these very titles a fortnight later as part of one of their five sessions in that month.

Kirby Walker, like other pianists who worked or recorded for Davis, such as Fats Waller, Una Mae Carlisle, and Gene Rodgers, toured throughout

Europe in the 1930s. In 1935 Walker recorded with Freddy Jenkins's Harlem Seven for Bluebird as a vocalist. The following year he appeared at clubs in Britain and Ireland as an accompanist to Nina Mae McKinney, before crossing the Channel for an extended stay in Paris. Their gig at the Dingo Club led to a tour of Australia the following year, before returning to the United States in 1938. Although his promised session with Davis failed to materialize, he eventually recorded as a vocalist in 1946 for De Luxe with Leonard Feather, Budd Johnson, and Jimmy Shirley and three years later as a bandleader-pianist-vocalist for Columbia.

Following the flurry of recordings by the 5 Red Caps in mid-1943, contractual difficulties (possibly with the Nat Nazarro Management Agency, who'd represented them as The Four Toppers since September 25, 1941) apparently emerged. Ironically, this veteran agent who managed many other black acts, including the Buck and Bubbles dance duo, operated from Davis's old base at 1619 Broadway. The Nazarro-negotiated two-year contract from March 23, 1944, allowed for up to twenty-four selections to be recorded in the first year. Davis eagerly commenced recording more than two weeks before the contract date with sessions on March 7, March 17, March 29, and March 31 working diligently to nail down the twenty-four titles as soon as possible. By April 6 he had already reached twenty titles and the remaining four came on May 4, 1944.

As usual, Davis-written tunes, such as jivey songs like "It's So Good," predominated these sessions. More often than not, however, Davis penned more dour, introspective songs like "I Didn't Mean to Be Mean to You," "Don't Say We're Thru," and "I Was a Fool to Let You Go" for the group. As in 1943 Irene Higginbotham wrote the more interesting (and usually up-tempo) items. In addition to "Red Caps Ball," she contributed the ethereal "In the Quiet of the Dawn," which featured Jimmy Springs's high tenor to excellent effect and can be viewed as a seminal do-wop selection.

Even if Davis rushed his group into the studios with unparalleled activity during the spring of 1944, he paid them more generously. Steve Gibson received \$300.00 for the March 7 session, which produced four titles. Davis, however, shrewdly countersigned the check with a notation that the 5 Red Caps would never record these titles for anyone else and that Davis owned full rights to the group's name. Doubtless the cleared check remained on file until he and Nazarro negotiated a new contract.

A transcript of the March 15, 1944, Hugh Conover show, *Personally, It's Off the Record*, beamed over WABC in New York as part of CBS's syndicated network, demonstrates one way that Davis publicized his releases.

The show, which highlighted recent recordings and interviewed someone related to the product, focused on the 5 Red Caps and Davis. Conover opened the show with these observations:

CONOVER: There are few individuals who are talented enough to become successful in more than one particular field. We have such a person with us in the studio today—a man whose influence upon the entertainment world has been great for the last twenty years. He's Joe Davis—songwriter, publisher, gentleman, business man, scholar and explorer. Step right up, Joe—and say “hello.”

DAVIS: Hello, Hugh, how are you? Say, who were all those fellows you were talking about? I mean the gentleman, scholar and explorer?

CONOVER: Well, unless they were three other guys, I was talking about you.

DAVIS: Well, how do you know I'm a gentleman?

CONOVER: Why . . . I . . .

DAVIS: See, you can't prove it. And what makes you think I'm a scholar?

CONOVER: Well . . . gee, Joe . . . you've done . . . I mean, you've been . . .

DAVIS: Well, there you are, Conover . . . caught again. Now what's this about my being an explorer?

It's all pleasant, self-effacing hokey patter, but it leads directly into an exposé of what Davis is and does.

CONOVER: I'm glad you asked me that, Joe . . . because any guy who published such tunes as “Basin Street Blues,” “After You've Gone,” “I Ain't Got Nobody,” “Sweet Hawaiian Moonlight” [an odd quartet of tunes], and too many others to talk about—then went on to start some of the best known composers off on the road to fame, including Reginald Foresythe, Harold Arlen, Carson Robison and Rube Bloom [yet another disparate quartet], then going into the recording field with a choice group of select artists, to say nothing of tossing off a couple of hit tunes of your own—well, Joe—if you're not an explorer at least of new fields to conquer—somebody ought to page Frank Buck.

Conover then played the 5 Red Caps's “Words Can't Explain” and “another hit tune for the boys which flowed from the pen of Mr. Davis . . .

the ‘Boogie Woogie Ball.’” Although Conover spoke of “the aggregation of young gentlemen called the Five Red Caps,” the show functioned as a Davis promotional quarter-hour slot with a script that smells like Davis penned it himself.

The first recording session in April 1944 resembled a dream come true for Davis. Through reedman Walter Thomas, he assembled a superb seven-piece combo including two of the top tenor saxmen of the day (Ben Webster and Budd Johnson) and began Celebrity—a new label to accommodate the recordings. His *Release Sheet* 30 trumpeted: “JOE DAVIS announces his new CELEBRITY RECORD series Comprised of internationally known artists and America’s leading exponents of modern jazz and swing . . .”

This sheet noted a release date of May 15 for “Broke But Happy” and “Blues on the Delta” by Walter Thomas and his Jump Cats (& His All Stars on later issues). The former Cab Calloway and King Oliver reedman, Walter Thomas, assembled a small combo including Ben Webster and drummer Cozy Cole, with whom he’d played in the Calloway band. Budd Johnson was the other (and leading) tenor sax, while Clyde Hart on piano and Oscar Pettiford (bass) rounded out the rhythm section. The underrated Emmett Berry joined this distinguished front line on trumpet.

Davis quickly released all four Thomas-written tunes, though the existence of numerous, complete alternative takes only came to light in the 1980s. *The Billboard*, reviewing “Broke But Happy” in June 1944, reported that it “makes for an infectious dish . . . without blowing the roof off the machine. It was a breezy and jumpy riff opus . . . with flashes of pianology and alto sax interplay.” The public clearly agreed, for on September 30, 1944, Davis happily paid the AFM fees on sales of 16,971 copies. By that time Davis had already arranged for a further Walter Thomas All-Stars session, as well as a quartet session under the leadership of legendary tenor saxist Coleman Hawkins.

April saw two new stars added to Davis’s recording roster. The *New York Enquirer* reported that “‘Singin’ Sam Waxes Two Hit Records For Beacon,” reckoning that “Beacon had a big asset in [the] new artist.” It further reported that Davis was only Sam’s fourth sponsor in seventeen years, the others having included Coca Cola and the Great States Lawn Mower Company. “Singin’ Sam” (aka Harry Frankel) hides the true identity of the general manager of Gennett’s pressing plant in Richmond, Indiana. Although his records might sound rather tepid today, he certainly sold well for Davis.

Of far more interest was his signing of the ex-Bluebird recording star Una Mae Carlisle, a protégé of Fats Waller early in her career. The *New York Enquirer* (badly needing a proofreader) reported that "Joe Davis has executed another smart move by signing Una Mae Carle." This proved to be an excellent signing for Una Mae Carlisle, who'd enjoyed particular success for Bluebird, notably "Walkin' by the River," from 1940. She recorded in May 1938 in England and in France with Dave Wilkins (trumpet), Alan Ferguson (guitar), and Len Harrison (string bass), who recorded three months later on Fats Wallers's London Session. After recording in Paris in January 1939, she even sang on one song with Fats Waller on a 1939 Victor session in New York City following her return from Europe.

Davis chose a small combo to back her on Beacon, much like the group that accompanied her for the Bluebird sessions. The band included ex-Ellington trumpeter Ray Nance, with Budd Johnson once more on tenor sax. Drummer Shadow Wilson recorded with Lionel Hampton and replaced Jo Jones in the Count Basie band when Jones was called up for army duty. The bass player, listed in the files and on the record labels as "Basie" Robinson, was Basil "Bass" Robinson, according to the *Enquirer*.

The group recorded four titles at the WOR studios in just under three hours on the afternoon of May 23. The last tune recorded, "'Tain't Yours," received particular attention. The *Enquirer* reported that "Beacon Lands New Record Hit," while in *Look*, critic Leonard Feather remarked that "Ray Nance's trumpet high lights both sides." By the end of September 1944, it had sold over 19,000 copies in just under three months.

All the titles at this session, and a second one with the same band two days later, were written by Una Mae and her manager, Barney Young. The latter roughed out the words to "Without You Baby" on Hotel Lincoln notepaper. On June 10 *The Billboard* reviewer wrote "for her bow on Beacon the waxworks has also provided her with a fine jump crew of more than passing interest, prominently of Ray Nance, out of Ellington's camp." Davis swiftly published the sheet music of his Una Mae hits, with a delightful photograph of her in a truly remarkable hat. The back of her sheet music plugged Deryck Sampson's boogie sides, presumably because both played piano.

By July 10 the *New York Enquirer* reported a song from the second session was bringing "a steady stream of orders for 'I Like It 'Cause I Love It.'" By October 9 it served up a headline reading "Beacon Record Has Ace Disc in 'I Like It 'Cause I Love It.'" The same publication remarked that Miss

Carlisle currently enjoyed an engagement at the “Ruban Bleu, a swanky night spot.”

Just as Una Mae Carlisle’s sides began selling well, Davis enjoyed a breakthrough with “I Learned a Lesson I’ll Never Forget,” one of the tunes he had written for the 5 Red Caps, and recorded with them in August 1943. It was in the best Ink Spots’ tradition and by June 10 jumped to #9 in *The Billboard’s* “Harlem Hit Parade.”

In May the *New York Enquirer* headlined that “Jack Robbins had taken over ‘I Learned A Lesson’” and the BMI journal *Poor Williams Almanac*, for June 6 urged its members “to use the song as much as you wish . . . as performance rights are exclusively BMI.” When BMI published a booklet in 1968 to mark twenty-five years of its involvement in “Rhythm and Blues,” one of its six biggest hits for 1944 was “I’ve [*sic*] Learned a Lesson I’ll Never Forget,” with the writer (originally Davis) shown as Leslie York. At least half of the Davis pseudonym was being maintained; under these circumstances he could hardly use his ASCAP name.

Despite Davis’s normal resistance to selling material, he clearly felt that he could obtain the advantage of having the first recording of “I Learned a Lesson” on Beacon by the 5 Red Caps and could also benefit from the vastly greater potential of Robbins Music Corporation pushing the song. By June 1944 the *Enquirer* reported that the 5 Red Caps’ version had “sold close to a quarter of a million Beacon records” and “had convinced Jack Robbins that the number had displayed sufficient promise to warrant a No. 1 plug.” Two weeks later the *Enquirer* carried Robbins’s plug; an eighth-page advertisement for “I Learned a Lesson” and one other 5 Red Caps song.

Robbins certainly worked hard to push the song, which must have justified Davis’s confidence in his decision. Their English agent, Sun Music Publishing, printed the sheet music “as featured and broadcast by Debroy Somers and his Orchestra.” RCA leapt in, covering the song by Dinah Shore and by August the *Enquirer* reported sales in excess of 300,000. Like Davis, Jack Robbins was an old hand at promoting his own product. While on business in Berlin in 1925, he stepped to the microphone at a session by the Alex Hyde band (comprising mostly ex-patriot Americans, including blacks) to sing the vocal on “Florida,” which he had just published.

With no sessions between Una Mae Carlisle’s of May 25 and a small group in August, the summer of 1944 was quiet; perhaps Davis was spending more time in his Connecticut retreat. Other aspects of his business

naturally continued, despite the lull in recording. Ever mindful of his own legacy, Davis still cut out references from the trade papers regarding his old company, Triangle Music, now run by Mickey Garlock and his staff.

In June 1944, the handbook *Record Retailing: A Guide to Record Merchandising* gave Davis a page plug, under the caption "Beacon Broadening Field," in celebration of its second year in the business. Davis, it reported, was undertaking a series of new steps: "Addition of the new label . . . Celebrity Records; acquisition of 100 original masters; signing of a number of artists for exclusive recordings; completion of plans for an extensive program of record plugging over the radio throughout the country, and directing of sales efforts toward expanding service to record dealers in all 48 states."

The article observed that the last item in the list was a "change in Beacon policy," and then related an interesting interpretation of how Davis found himself to be in the record business:

Two years ago he figured a new exploitation or publicity stunt for his Beacon Music Publishing business . . . he would have some of his sheet music numbers recorded and send a batch of discs to the radio stations for plugging by disc jockeys.

As the exploitation business got under way and the stations and the men in charge of the recorded music programs showed themselves receptive to the idea, Mr. Davis discovered that he was in the wrong business. Juke Box operators, hearing the Beacon Music Publishing Co. songs plugged on records, began flooding him with inquiries as to where they could get the discs.

Beacon Record Co. was born, and in addition to sending the unusual [*sic*] song plugging material to the disc jockeys, the company was shipping records to juke operators . . . This led to calls from record buyers to dealers, and from dealers to Beacon. Demands from juke operators could take up the whole Beacon Record output, just as they could that of virtually any company in these days of limited production, but Mr. Davis came to a new conclusion, and another phase in his company's history came into being. "We want to be in the record business to stay, and to do that it is essential we build a nation-wide business," he stated recently. "So I would rather sell a thousand records in a thousand places than sell a thousand to one outlet."

This 1944 article suggests that a series of events drew Davis into the manufacture of records, rather than a deliberate decision on his part.

Davis himself recollected that he went into the business in order to exploit one particular Jerry Wayne song. The facts probably lie in the middle. Davis, once he decided that Wayne's title held great sales potential, found he could sell pretty much whatever he released. Therefore, what initially began as something of an ad hoc arrangement (as the article suggests), rapidly turned into a bona fide release program in a number of different series. The article ended by stating that Beacon releases were in three price brackets; 50 and 75 cents for the ten-inch discs, and \$1.50 for the twelve-inch, which accounts for their extreme rarity. Celebrity discs, presumably because of the greater AFM session fees, retailed for \$1.00.

The November 1943 AFM agreement with Davis called for an accounting of the records pressed and sold. Naturally, no payments were made to the AFM on material that predated that agreement. This list covering the period ending on June 30, 1944, underscores Davis's success in the business:

Beacon 7013	Will Bradley	"Jingle Bells Boogie Woogie" & "Cryin' The Boogie Blues"	22,425
Beacon 7015	Deryck Sampson	"Erin Go Boogie" & "Boogie Express"	4,673
Beacon 7150	Singin' Sam	"You'll Regret It One Day" & "Don't You Dare Call Me Darling"	22,769
Beacon 7123	5 Red Caps	"Somebody's Lyin'" & "Was It You?"	20,586
Celebrity 8125	Walter Thomas	"Broke But Happy" & "Blues On The Delta"	10,827

Singin' Sam, the 5 Red Caps, and Walter Thomas chalked up their sales in just under three months and on these alone Davis paid the AFM three-fourths cent on the Beacon releases and one cent on the Celebrity 78, for a total payment of \$639.16. These sales also show that interest in boogie piano items was on the wane by now and why Davis persisted with further jazz releases. The sales enjoyed by Singin' Sam underscores the significance of purely popular music; "You'll Regret It One Day" and "Don't You Dare Call Me Darling" outsold his other releases and in the shortest period.

It is also instructive to see exactly what Davis included in his wide-ranging catalogue, which from late in 1944 offers some insight into his idiosyncratic use of different release series for each artist. For example, after he



began the Beacon 100 series, it eventually morphed into a series almost entirely devoted to the 5 Red Caps, beginning with Beacon 115.

Beacon 1, 2	Deryck Sampson 12" discs
Celebrity 8001, 8002	Jules Bledsoe
Celebrity 8125, 8126	Walter Thomas
Beacon 100 through 117, excluding 101, which was issued as 108	
Beacon 3001, 3004	Robison/Luther: Chuck & Ellie Story
Beacon 2001	Murray and Silver (comedy)
Beacon 5001, 5002, 5004	Billie Hayes x 2: Gabriel Brown
Beacon 7004, 7005, 7006, 7007, 7009, 7011, 7015, 7016, 7017	Deryck Sampson
Beacon 7119, 7120, 7121, 7123	5 Red Caps
Beacon 7150, 7152	Singin' Sam

The catalogue shows that Davis did not release issues in purely chronological order and that various series ran in parallel. Although the Beacon 100 series continued, it eventually became a 7100 series. Oddly, the 5 Red Caps Beacon 118 was not yet available in either form—as 118 or 7118. For some reason the Will Bradley release (7013) simply fits into the ongoing Deryck Sampson series; perhaps Davis appreciated that it was a one-off session, so merely allocated 7013, 7014 in a current series.

By August 1944, Davis returned to the recording studio overseeing a session with Erskine Butterfield, at WOR studios on the morning of August 17, followed a few days later by sessions with the 5 Red Caps and Una Mae Carlisle. Scheduled for three hours until noon, Butterfield walked in so well rehearsed that he cut eight piano solos with half an hour to spare, which was okay because artists were paid their full AFM fee even if they finished early. Davis broke the Decca pattern of recording Butterfield with a small combo and settled for solo items, never easy to sell, as he must have known from the declining sales of Deryck Sampson. This time, however, he moved into a slightly more sophisticated mould, as titles such as "Piano Cocktail," "Fantasy in Blue," and "Dream Time" suggest. Just the same, Butterfield also recorded "Part-Time Boogie," "Boogie Woogie Barcarolle," and "Six-Thirty Express."

Butterfield—now in New York on leave from the army, having been called up in January 1944 and sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey—wrote to

Davis: "I've been playing for the different posts and hospitals also teaching the different quartettes, so as you can see I'm still a musician but not at the figure that Walter [Thomas] use [*sic*] to get for me . . . I hope it will be half as nice as Fort Dix has been. I had a quartette consisting of: Slim Furness—guitar (3 Keys), Eugene Brooks—drums (Eddie Heywood), Lynwood Jones—bass (Loumel Morgan Trio). I'll write to you from Camp Lee and try to write something. I'll have to go through Basic Training and I understand it's a bit rough."

By late March, Butterfield completed Basic Training and then trained as a baker. He attended band training, passed the examination, and became a percussionist (cymbal and drums). He actually played bass drum in the bugle corps, but in fairness to the army, he did play piano in a dance band and led his own trio, with Al Norris on guitar and Duke Jones on drums.

By that time Davis wrote informing him that "Deryck's record of 'Blackberry Jam' and 'Monday's Wash' [was] selling well." He also advised that he hoped to record Butterfield's "'Goin' On An Errand For Uncle Sam,' by Kirby Walker, he sings and plays the piano a little in the order of Fat's [*sic*] and I think that he will do a good job with it. As soon as we get set I will let you know." Nothing came of it, however.

By 1945 Butterfield wrote that "I am going to Washington either Wednesday or Thursday to cut some V Discs and I thought that you'd be interested to know that we're going to record 'Chocolate.' It will be piano, electric guitar, and bass fiddle." He also reported he had been playing a few band shows in Richmond, Virginia, and vicinity. Some months later Butterfield told Davis that he had cut "Chocolate" for the "U.S. Army Spanish Service." He recorded his only known V-Discs (other than some small combo sides reissued from World Transcriptions) at Camp Lee in April 1945. Camp Lee sits just east of Petersburg, Virginia, some thirty miles south of Richmond. The session resulted in one band track and two trio cuts, but none was "Chocolate." Interestingly, the band's personnel included a tenor sax player named Foots, which was Walter Thomas's usual nickname. Given his close involvement with Butterfield, it's probable that he was present.

Corporal Butterfield's (#42102137) closing line in a letter—"take good care of yourself and regards to Mrs. Beacon and children"—underscores the friendly relationship between the two men. Davis included assorted pieces of information in his letters, so that Butterfield could write "that was too bad about Bob Zurke." Zurke, pianist with Bob Crosby, had been working at the Hangover Club in Los Angeles, when he collapsed and died in February 1944. On the surface no direct connection existed among

Davis and Butterfield and Zurke, which makes one appreciate the informal musical friendship network that goes largely undocumented.

Doubtless inspired by the rather brisk sales of his small (both vocal and nonvocal) jazz groups, Davis brought Una Mae Carlisle back into the studio on August 30 to cut four more titles. This time he backed her with a small Dixieland combo, producing a sound similar to Savannah Churchill's set. With trumpeter Billy Butterfield, the band included his Bob Crosby Bobcats sidekicks Bill Stegmeyer on clarinet and Bob Haggart on bass, plus Vernon Brown from Butterfield's Artie Shaw band period, and veteran drummer George Wettling. As the date's leader, Bob Haggart collected \$60.00 to the sidemen's \$30.00. Davis released "Teasin' Me" and "You and Your Heart of Stone" quite quickly and a third title from the session, "You're Gonna Change Your Mind," became the flip side for a title issued from an abortive October session with a different band. The fourth title from the August 30 session, "Crying Need for You," remained unavailable until Davis released a now-hard-to-find three-78 disc Carlisle album in 1946.

Early in August, Davis wrote to Tommy Dorsey offering to pay him \$10,000 to record four of Davis's tunes for release on one of his labels. Dorsey's personal manager, Arthur Michaud, turned the offer down as they were "tied up with RCA Victor." If nothing else it shows that considerable sums of money could be made from music publishing, provided the right "name band" covered the tunes.

In mid-August Davis engaged an attorney, through the good offices of the AFM, to explore the possibility of terminating or altering his Toppers/Nat Nazarro-negotiated contract with his hottest group, the 5 Red Caps. In the meantime he held a mid-September session with the group and another, perhaps their best (from a jump-jive viewpoint), on October 26. The latter produced "Monkey and the Baboon" (an old Spencer Williams number), and three new tunes in that vein from Irene Higginbotham, "It's Got a Hole in It," "Get Off That Kick," and "That's the Stuff." In November their version of "I Learned a Lesson" earned the #4 spot on *Billboard's* "most played Juke Box Folk Records" after selections by Louis Jordan, Al Dexter, and Ernest Tubbs.

In September 1944 Davis invited Gabriel Brown back into the studio for the first time in over a year, despite the fact that he had issued only two of eight titles to date. Davis brought him into the Empire Studio for a session commencing at 8:00 P.M., having already spent from 3:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. laying down an excellent 5 Red Caps session. Brown quickly

set to work and Davis, too, seemed in no mood to tarry after spending all afternoon in the studio. In his own account of the session, Davis marked as far as eight titles on his sheet, with the sixth actually shown as “My Sign,” but then scored out. The contract called for five titles and Brown obliged within one hour. Brown must have been quite pleased at his \$80.00 for the session; that is noticeably above AFM rates. Davis himself ultimately released four of the titles recorded that day. Perhaps because Davis had a number already on the shelf, “I’m Gonna Take It Easy” and “Not Now I’ll Tell You When” were not released until February 1946, and then on a new label, Davis. The fifth title remained unissued until 1983.

*The Billboard* for September 23, 1944, ran an “Identification Survey of Record Labels” among armed service personnel and found that 100 percent of those interviewed knew of Victor. Significantly, 22.2 percent knew of Beacon, which rated eleventh in the survey overall, far better than most small independents. In chart ratings for the year, Beacon once more came sixth, just behind Keynote and well ahead of Excelsior, DeLuxe, and OKeh.

One reason for his status in this survey was Davis’s determination to broaden the base of his operations. Having to date only the Murray/Silver comedy disc in his category, he arranged through the Stanford Zucker Agency to record Stan Fritts’s Korn Kobbler, a group based on the Hoosier Hot Shots. The contract allowed for two New York sessions each to provide four sides, for a total of \$2,000.00. With standard AFM rates of \$60.00 a session for the leader and half that for sidemen, Davis once again paid generously.

### Gennett Returns

The trade press in September 1944 broke the biggest news yet in Davis’s rapidly expanding enterprise. The *New York Enquirer* for September 18 ran a small caption heading, “Gennett Back In Disc Field,” and a report that “The Gennett Record is moving back into the disk field at a fast clip. In fact, within the next six weeks it will be shelling off its presses more than 250,000 records monthly via one shift. Many persons now active in the music business never heard of the Gennett Record, and if you happen to be one don’t get the idea it is a newcomer sans experience and equipment . . . Gennett had among its artists such sterling performers as Cliff Edwards, Arthur Fields, Kaufmann Brothers [*sic*], Sam Ash and Collins and Harlan.”

It is doubtful if anyone reading this in the twenty-first century would have omitted King Oliver, Sam Collins, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, William Harris, Bix Beiderbecke, and many other jazz and blues greats from the list. Toward the end of the column the *Enquirer* revealed: "Gennett will manufacture records at its plant in Richmond, Ind., where Harry (Singin' Sam) Frankel will be general manager of the plant. Joe Davis will have complete charge of selecting the talent and the songs to be recorded and listed and also will be the exclusive selling and distribution agent for all records made by Gennett."

Thus in one swoop Davis not only augmented his stable of labels, he also acquired his own pressing plant, all because the Decca deal with Gennett had fallen through. It further meant that the small amount of shellac available under wartime restrictions for his Beacon/Celebrity labels greatly increased; as an existing record manufacturer, Gennett had access to more of the available shellac. Records released on this "new" Gennett label were frequently those already released on Beacon.

By 1945, when Davis was also operating the Joe Davis label, one could find certain releases, such as the first two Gabriel Brown issues (5003, 5004) on all three labels and seemingly simultaneously available. Davis took great pride in this major deal, which Gennett Records Release Sheet No. 1 spelled out in full: "JOE DAVIS [in two-inch capitals] takes great pride in announcing that thru the kindness and courtesy of the Gennett Record Division of the Starr Piano Co. Inc. of Richmond, Ind. he has secured the exclusive sales and distribution rights to Gennett Records [set in the distinctive 1920s italic typeface]. The first releases of ten inch black label records will be ready for shipment about September 20, 1944. These records now available only on Gennett Records."

This last line suggests that earlier Beacon issues were withdrawn once stocks had sold out. Ten Gennett releases commenced the program: five 5 Red Caps releases, two by Gabriel Brown, two by Savannah Churchill, and a Clayton McMichen. Davis's wholesale price now dropped to 49 cents inclusive of freight and federal tax costs. The Gennett label used was strikingly similar to the earlier 1920s label so beloved of collectors. The issue chosen to kick off the series, understandably in view of Davis's old Georgia Music publishing house, was Gennett 4859-B: Ray Miller's "Georgia."

In a detailed, sixteen-claused contract, Gennett retained the right to press and sell records other than Gennett for other parties, provided all its contractual obligations to Davis were met. Davis then loaned Gennett \$15,000.00 in order to keep it afloat, which required repayment at \$500.00

per month plus interest commencing November 1, 1944. As security Davis held the title to Gennett's pressing equipment, "ten No. 5B Electric Mystic Presses, two gyrators, 1 hammermill, ten steam tables and ten sets of dies."

October 1944 proved extremely busy for Davis in the recording studios. He scheduled further sessions from Walter Thomas, Una Mae Carlisle, Gabriel Brown, and the 5 Red Caps. Out of these sessions came a quartet date featuring Coleman Hawkins—who had been present on the Walter Thomas date—and one by George "Bon Bon" Tunnell, a singer backed by the 5 Red Caps. Although the 5 Red Caps eventually returned to the Davis stable after their contract had been sorted out via the AFM and recorded many more sides, Bon Bon was to become the most prolific of all Davis's artists over the next two years.

George Tunnell, always called Bon Bon, performed at his Philadelphia high school with pianist Romaine Brown, now with the 5 Red Caps. He first recorded a decade earlier as a member of the Three Keys, as singer/pianist together with Slim Furness on guitar, a member of Erskine Butterfield's Fort Dix quartet. Tunnell eventually joined the Philadelphia-based society band of Jan Savitt as vocalist and recorded many times with them, eventually marrying his co-vocalist in the band, Carlotta Dale. Savitt's band—one of several excellent Philadelphia bands—ranked right with Joey Kearns and Elliott Lawrence.

With strong ties to nearby Philadelphia and the link between Romaine Brown and George Tunnell, it seemed inevitable that Bon Bon would record for Davis. Bon Bon's gentle style and excellent clear diction—especially with a ballad—precisely matched Davis's needs. His pleasant voice swung well when needed and some of his early titles settled into that mid-tempo pace that suited the 5 Red Caps. In fact, his first session for Davis began with the up-tempo "Apple Honey" followed by three ballads. Pleased with his debut session, Davis called Bon Bon to cut four more titles later in October.

Walter Thomas's second session, scheduled to commence at midnight on October 10, did not actually begin until 1:30 on Wednesday morning and ended at 3:45 A.M. Apart from pianist Clyde Hart and drummer Cozy Cole, only Thomas himself remained from the April session. Jonah Jones was on trumpet and Thomas beefed up the reed section to four men, using Coleman Hawkins, Eddie Barefield, and Hilton Jefferson. Once more the group recorded four titles and we are most fortunate to have access to all the takes made at the session, offering various approaches to the tunes, but especially being able to hear Hawkins in these alternate versions. Six

takes (four complete) of the Hawkins feature, "In the Hush of the Night," exist, while four takes (two complete) of the excellent up-tempo, Irene Higginbotham-written "Look Out, Jack" survive. Walter Thomas wrote both "Every Man for Himself" and "Out to Lunch," and three takes each remained in Davis's vaults. The latter title had been recorded in 1940 by Claude Hopkins's band and is unrelated to Eric Dolphy's jazz classic of the same name from 1964.

Neither *The Billboard* nor *DownBeat* cared too much for Celebrity 8128, "Look Out, Jack" and "Every Man for Himself." *The Billboard* (November 11, 1944) mentioned "a steady procession of hot choruses, and much of which hits off better in a back room than a baked shellac biscuit." Given Thomas's immaculate scores this rather dour review seems somewhat unfair, but is definitely better than *DownBeat*'s January 1945 review, which reckoned that "Jonah Jones plays fair trumpet, Coleman average sax, and Eddie Barefield rather uninspired clarinet. Jefferson should stick to lead alto work, at which he excels. His solo playing isn't so hot, in any sense of the word!"

Davis's release sheet for "Every Man for Himself" and "Look Out—Jack!" (*sic*) billed this "as the greatest aggregation of musicians ever to record." Measuring more than two feet long by fifteen inches wide, this rather bold advertisement called it "a record that is full of beats—jive—hep—and everything." The other two titles were coupled and issued as by Coleman Hawkins with Walter Thomas's orchestra. They seem not to have been reviewed in the contemporary press, which might have been to their advantage.

Little over a week later Davis brought Coleman Hawkins into the studio for an evening session as a soloist, together with the rhythm section with which he was working at the Downbeat Club—"Basie" Robinson on bass, Denzil Best on drums, and a young Thelonious Monk on piano. This marked Monk's studio recording debut, although some earlier live, informal recordings from Minton's were eventually released. A hint of the Monk to come glows through on these four titles: "Drifting on a Reed," "Recollections," "Flyin' Hawk," and "On the 'Bean.'" Hawkins picked up a fat \$400.00 for the session; rather better than the \$30.00 he had received as sideman on the earlier session. Walter Thomas again scored the tunes he had specially written for Hawkins.

Davis found little respite from his busy recording schedule. After this exhilarating session with Hawkins and Monk, he returned the following day with a three-hour session from 10:00 A.M. until 1:00 P.M. with Bon

Bon, with an hour off for lunch (or "Out to Lunch!"). Davis returned for a three-hour session from 2:00 P.M. with Una Mae Carlisle, which must have been the least satisfying of his career. At this late date we will never know what went wrong with the Una Mae Carlisle session, but in three hours she produced only one issueable title. Indeed, she managed to record only two of the scheduled four titles; remarkably all the takes survived. The small and talented band for the session, perhaps oddly imbalanced with Doc Cheatham on trumpet, Trummy Young on trombone, Walter Thomas on tenor sax, Cedric Hardwick on bass, and Wallace Bishop on drums, ought to have been able to hold things together. Nonetheless, only Doc Cheatham's standard of play remains high.

From take to take he is trying to inject something into this flaccid session, which Una Mae herself frequently ruined. The session started well enough, with an atmospheric "The Rest of Your Life," although Trummy Young's muted trombone behind the vocal is barely audible. The first—and only—complete take ends with some oddly resolved piano notes from Una Mae, following her last vocal lines, which she fumbled almost as if she were asking for another take. They attempted it a second time, but it broke off inside a minute and no further take seems to have been made. Despite the disappointing result Davis finally issued it on the back of "You're Gonna Change Your Mind" from the August 1944 session led by Bob Haggart with an all-white combo.

The group then moved on to the second tune slated for the session, "That Glory Day," and stayed for an extended period. Their twenty-four takes made it impossible to determine the order in which these sixteen-inch transcription discs preceded; not that it really matters. Three or four complete takes exist, but none is totally satisfactory. What on earth induced Davis to record so many failed takes defies a sensible answer.

A number of possible explanations come to mind, some of them outside Davis's ability to control. Trummy Young, who can only be heard faintly on the issued title, though it plainly is he, can be heard on only one take of "That Glory Day." Perhaps he simply was unwell and finally gave up, resulting in an even more imbalanced sounding combo that compromised Thomas's scores. As seasoned veterans, however, they ought to have been able to rise to the task, but the rhythm section was wooden at best and Thomas's tenor sax work was lifeless and pedestrian. The best that can be said for the completed takes is that Cheatham's trumpet playing would make some of them worth hearing. Clearly, the main fault lies with Una Mae. Her left hand sounds stiff and her vocal scansion inaccurate. She



constantly misses the words at the bridge until, on later takes, one senses a tension in her singing and playing as she approaches it; the band senses it, too. After one of her faults she audibly swears.

The other two titles scheduled to be recorded were “Treat Me Kindly” and “If I Can’t Sell It, I’ll Keep Sittin’ on It,” the latter an Andy Razaf tune written several years before. Davis finally obtained a nice recording of “That Glory Day” from Wingy Manone, and it is hard to see how Una Mae’s combo could fail to swing it. A rather inferior vocalist, Betty Thornton, recorded the Razaf tune two years later for Davis. The AFM return sheet showed just the one tune recorded, indicating that Davis had no intention of issuing one of the completed takes of “That Glory Day.”

Perhaps as a result of this desultory session, Una Mae Carlisle recorded no more for Davis, but the story didn’t quite end there for Davis and Carlisle. When Una Mae recorded for Savoy in July 1946, one of the titles chosen was Davis’s 1931 Fats Waller-Alex Hill hit, “I’m Crazy ‘Bout My Baby.” And in April 1953 he signed a contract for “Start Talking—I’m All Ears” cowritten by Una Mae Carlisle and Fess Williams (the ex-bandleader and former AFM Local 802 secretary).

Signing and nurturing new artists and recording formed only part of Davis’s work. He owed royalty payments to both new and past artists. The Fats Waller estate, for example, earned \$110.00 for the quarter through October 1944, mostly on “The Joint Is Jumpin.” Davis also continued buying masters from the Record Syndicate Trust/Scranton Record Company deal. These titles included six from the Quintette of the Hot Club of France with Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelly: “Tiger Rag,” “Lady Be Good,” “Dinah,” “Sheik of Araby,” “Smoke Rings,” and “I’m Confessin’ That I Love You.”

Davis’s selection of titles was interesting; five are obvious but “Smoke Rings” is less so, having been chosen over such possible choices as “Sweet Sue” and “Swanee River.” “Sheik of Araby” was actually an Alix Combelle (tenor sax and clarinet) recording with the QHCF. Almost as odd was the inclusion of “Smoke Rings,” which features three trumpets before Django enters, almost one-third of the way in. None of the next four titles that Joe released features a sax; “Avalon” was from the three-trumpet session.

Although he received metal parts early in 1944, he refrained from issuing these until October 1, 1945, on Joe Davis Records 8003, 8004, and 8005, respectively. Four of these titles later came out on a two-78 album and a seventh, “Avalon,” never earned a release. Davis subsequently bought the rights to four more of these 1934–1935 Ultraphone sides, “Swanee River,”

“Your Sweet Smile,” “I’ve Had My Moments,” and “Ultrafox” released as “Ultra Sox.” Together with the four titles from the original purchase batch, these made up Davis album DA-17.

In November 1944 Davis paid \$2,600.00 for fifty-two titles from the Record Syndicate Trust/Scranton Record Company catalogue. Twenty of the titles at a rate of \$25.00 each focused on Irish tunes by William Quinn, Pat Killoran, Quinn’s Dublin Orchestra, and the Irish Barn Dance Boys. He also purchased two titles by pop guitarist and studio stalwart Roy Smeck. As part of the same deal Davis released two as the Jubilee Male Quartet on Joe Davis 7000, which were, in fact, a 1932 Paramount of the Famous Blue Jay Singers “I’m Leaning on the Lord” and the Norfolk Jubilee Quartette’s “You’re Goin’ to Need That Pure Religion” from an even earlier 1927 Paramount. They had come via the Varsity 6008 reissue of these Paramount discs.

Davis soon paid \$50.00 each for a block of twenty-two European classical titles, although he made remarkably limited use of them. One of the very last of his albums to be released carried eight further titles under the heading Musicclassics (DA-32). The eight 12-inch recordings, all of light classical material, purchased in 1944 for \$900.00 remained unissued by Davis, suggesting that his priorities remained elsewhere.

At various points in the mid- to late 1940s he purchased other material by Sammy Kaye, Jan Peerce, and Marian Anderson. Significantly, he returned most often to the jazz and big band material, including rather uninspired performances by Frankie Trumbauer’s 1940 big band.

The Trumbauer band recorded for Varsity, receiving a fee of \$900.00 in February 1940. Although he had access to more selections, Davis used only enough titles to issue on a four-78 album, including the best-swinging sides (from a rather stilted band) “Jintown Blues” and “Sugar Foot Stomp,” as well as an excellent rendition of Meade Lux Lewis’s “Honky Tonk Train Blues” by band pianist Rene Faure. Despite being a piano solo, the Trumbauer band received label credit and the pianist was credited only with the solo.

His most notable jazz/big band additions were from the excellent Harry James band, which recorded extensively for Eli Oberstein’s Varsity label in 1940 after James had briefly dumped Columbia and before he re-signed with them. Harry James’s band cut loose on the Varsity sides and many titles show the band and its soloists in fine form, especially on “Four or Five Times,” “Boog It,” “Come and Get It,” “Tuxedo Junction” and, perhaps the best of all, “Swanee River.” Most notable among all these Varsity recordings by Harry James is the inclusion of new vocalist Dick Haymes, who took

over when Frank Sinatra signed with Tommy Dorsey. However, James also cut his fabulous trumpet features—"Carnival of Venice" and "Flight of the Bumble Bee"—with Varsity before he recorded them for Columbia. His control on "Carnival," even for James, is quite remarkable.

Sadly, the assorted reissue 78s, Davis's among them, featuring this excellent band all suffer from awful pressings—or more accurately, perhaps, awful pressing materials. Because these small, independent companies relied on recycled material to press new records, the quality of the material varied greatly but was often quite poor. Davis's sides are probably slightly better than those on Elite and Hit, for example, but even new copies of a Davis-owned label from the middle 1940s play with a pronounced underlying hiss.

When Davis purchased more sides from other companies, he most often purchased blues, gospel, and jazz material. For \$20.00 each, he obtained enough titles by the black Southern Wonder Quartet to issue eight in an album and returned to the Varsity Race Section to collect four titles, which were released on Gennett's 5005 and 5007. Two Big Bill Broonzy titles from a 1932 Champion session and two 1930 Champions by Georgia Tom Dorsey and Jane Lucas were cross-coupled. Gennett 5005 consisted of Big Bill's "Beedle Um Bum" and Georgia Tom's "Terrible Operation Blues" while 5007 coupled Big Bill's "Sellin' That Stuff" with "Where Did You Stay Last Night," by Jane Lucas (a pseudonym for Mozelle Anderson). These purchased releases complete the exceptionally rare 5000 series that commenced with Gennett 5003 by Gabriel Brown, who also appeared on 5004, 5006, and 5008. Davis apparently never issued Gennett 5000 and then skipped 5001 and 5002 because he had already issued Beacon 5001 and 5002 by Billie Hayes. The scarcity of this series contributes to the difficulty in assigning the proper release numbers.

At the same time that Davis paid \$980.00 for the Frankie Trumbauer and Southern Wonder Quartet sides, he purchased a small number of Cuban sides by the Septeto Cauto and four titles by the 1939 W. C. Handy Orchestra, originally recorded for Varsity. The core of the Luis Russell band, with Pops Foster and Sid Catlett laying down the rhythm and J. C. Higginbotham on trombone, Ed Hall on clarinet, and Bingie Madison on tenor sax wrestled with Handy's cornet and vocal. All in all this inauspicious session was marred by too much audible tension. "Loveless Love" features a good tenor solo and a quirky, but really quite delightful, Handy vocal. Davis used this as well as the more obvious "St. Louis Blues" on a four-78 album called *RARE RECORDS Volume 1* (*Volume 2* doesn't exist) along with two titles

by the Tommy Tucker Orchestra, two by Johnny McGhee and three titles (two on one side of the original Varsity) by Frankie Trumbauer, "Wearing of the Green" and "Irish Washerwoman" and "Stars and Stripes Forever." Even in this eclectic mix, the Handy selections fit quite oddly. The other two titles by Handy for Varsity, "Beale Street Blues" and "Way Down South Where the Blues Begin" with a vocal, remained un-reissued by Davis. One might be thankful in the case of the latter; but then Handy only received \$25.00 per title for them.

On November 24, 1944, Davis recorded a four-title session with singer Maxine Sullivan at the Empire Studio accompanied by a band led by ex-Waller bass-player Cedric Wallace that featured an odd instrumentation, to say the least. According both to the AFM contract sheet and to Davis's own notes, Wallace's sideman included trumpeter Courtney Williams, who also played with Waller's band in 1938. Apart from the rhythm section of Everett Barksdale on guitar, Wallace and Kenneth Billings (presumably on piano), this drummer-less ensemble added three violins; presumably veteran session men Samuel Rand, Joseph N. Breen, and Samuel Persoff. Persoff recorded with Artie Shaw in 1936 and, together with Rand, appeared in Ted Steele's orchestra, which accompanied Perry Como on his Chesterfield broadcasts from December 1944 to mid-1945.

Davis eventually issued these sides on two discs, Joe Davis 7420 and 7421. None had survived among Davis's effects and they are exceptionally rare. The compilers of an LP issue of Maxine Sullivan's early sides released in 1986 in the United States, illegally used 7420 but not 7421, suggesting that the compilers had no luck in locating "Confession Is Good for the Soul" and "The Story of Our Love Affair." The other coupling, "I Carry the Torch for You" and "Behavin' Myself for You" foregrounds the violins, though Barksdale plays sufficiently fine guitar to keep them further in the background.

Listening to this coupling, one can see why perhaps these *are* scarce discs. They have an in-built recording defect, which almost certainly became apparent only after processing. Nothing would have been audible when the masters were cut. The problem arises from bass saturation, a by-product of a non-feedback electrical system, causing a loss of control within the amplifier. The bass blanks out some of the upper-range (i.e., the violins), which distorts other notes, although here the violins suffered most noticeably. The effect produces a wavering sound, as certain of the higher notes simply disappear completely, or fade in and out like a pulse. Out-of-pocket by the cost of the session (the AFM musicians' fees, and

\$100.00 for Maxine Sullivan), Davis must have been thoroughly disheartened and never recorded her again. Although Courtney Williams is shown as being present, he is not to be heard (playing trumpet, at least) on 7420, although he might be on the other coupling.

Early in December 1944 Davis received a letter from Harrison Smith under the letterhead of (the presumably self-styled) American Jazz Institute in Brooklyn, denying Davis's right to the name, 5 Red Caps. After all the publicity it seemed rather late to be entering such a claim, although the letter makes fascinating reading: "Relative to your claim of RED CAPS title please be advised that you have no claim upon said title, inasmuch as THE ORIGINAL 5 RED CAPS broadcasted over WMCA-WINS-WNEW-WEAF with Reser's Eskimos and from Tom. Noonan's Bowery Mission way back in 1930. In that year, they recorded Columbia 14621: My Little Dixie Home—a song by me and Ben. Garrison. Columbia paid the artists instead of me for use of the song, therefore the record I possess suffices as a lien and I claim ownership of the said title, which I am willing to sell to you or Nazarro." Doubtless this was the last thing Davis needed in his ongoing difficulties over the group and their name but, by early 1945, the 5 Red Caps completed a further contract. One suspects that Harrison Smith's "lien" by way of an extant Columbia disc of fifteen years previous counted little.

To round out the year, Davis recorded another jazz combo, a sensible and cohesive unit organized by trumpeter Wingy Manone. Drummer George Wettling was present, who also appeared on the August 1944 Una Mae Carlisle session organized by Bob Haggart, along with Conrad Lanoue on piano, Irving Lang on bass, and Charles Matthew Jagelka (better known as Chuck Wayne) on guitar. Manone chose the excellent clarinetist Joe Marsala and the little-recorded and much underestimated Frank Orchard on valve trombone. With the unfortunate technical problems that marred the Maxine Sullivan session at the Empire Studio presumably now rectified, Davis returned there for the Manone session.

Manone's group recorded four titles on the afternoon of December 15 with three or four surviving takes of the first three titles: "O Sole Mio," "Shake the Blues Away," and "That Glory Day"—the title that Una Mae's group was unable to record satisfactorily. The alternative takes provide intriguing insights into the recording process. Manone, always prone to ad lib various comments in his own vocals, let alone when band members take breaks, can be heard to excellent effect on "Shake the Blues Away," another number from the fertile mind of Irene Higginbotham. After

Manone's vocal on take-1 he exhorts the clarinetist: "Shake it, Joseph!" to which Marsala's immediate response is just that—a clarinet trill built into the solo, whereupon Manone, in some awe, says, "He's really shakin' it!" Too much chatter possibly irritated Davis for on take-2 there are no exhortations after Manone's vocal and Marsala plays an entirely different solo . . . with no shakes. Davis presumably thought it a little too stilted and take-3 (the one finally issued) had the clarinet solo closer to take-1, with a small "shake" included—but no asides from Manone.

The band's approach to "That Glory Day" is also most interesting, given the problems that Una Mae Carlisle's band experienced. Significantly, Joe Marsala swings throughout in a manner that Walter Thomas never once achieved. The vocal bridge section where Una Mae constantly went astray, at the somewhat awkward couplet:

Don't be taken by surprise,  
and not be prepared to go

also posed Manone some difficulties. The accents are on the first half of "taken" and on "not" in the next line, but he always managed to ride them competently. The Manone version split the vocal choruses; the first was by Manone, while the second had Manone ad libbing comments into an unidentified second vocalist's lines. Manone copes well enough, but it took a third take for the other vocalist to handle the chorus successfully; the trumpeter's notable clinkers foil the fourth take. Take-1 features a superb ad lib by Manone following the other vocalist's attempt to recover from a slip. Mugging in what today would be considered a racist manner, the mystery vocalist sings: "Sisters, and Brothers, 'ware all I say, Every day is . . . (pause) on earth is just a gas," at which Manone, responding in time to the rhythm, sings "Is you kiddin'?" George Wettling might be the second vocalist, though Frank Orchard's trombone is silent throughout the vocal. Davis must have been well pleased with these sides, foreshadowing a future date.

The final recording session for 1944 featured a new popular singer, Armen Camp, whom Davis clearly wanted to cover the welter of ballads that he had been writing and as another vocalist to complement Bon Bon, who was recording similar material. *Variety* for December 27, 1944, mentioned Armand (*sic*) Camp, stating that Davis's contract was "a personal management agreement, Davis's first with an artist, and the idea is to give him a build-up on the Davis-owned recordings." Personal management agreements constituted a small part of his business and this was possibly

the first such agreement since Martha Copeland signed with Davis in the 1920s. Armen Camp came to Davis's notice via Frank Capano, a Philadelphia writer and music publisher who hoped to sell Davis one of his songs. Davis ignored the song but signed Camp for five years.

At his debut recording session, Camp, accompanied by Archie Bleyer's orchestra, recorded four Davis-written tunes. Bleyer's very popular orchestra included a few names known to jazz collectors—Billy Rausch's trombone anchored the Casa Loma Orchestra from 1929 until the war, Kurt Dieterle played violin with Paul Whiteman for almost ten years from 1927, while Pete Pumiglio's clarinet was heard on many 1920s hot dance sessions, among them a number by the California Ramblers. According to a report found among Davis's papers "Let's Be Honest with Each Other" and "Never Be Cruel to the One You Love," "received enthusiastic praise from coin box operators" and "will be heard on slightly more than eight hundred stations throughout the country through the facilities of BMI."

In the six months to December 31, 1944, Davis paid the AFM their 1 percent levy for a total of \$1,480.88. This takes no account of sales on discs recorded prior to the AFM agreement of 1943 or on material bought in from the Record Syndicate Trust, suggesting that sales must have been substantial. Comparative sales of those on which Davis paid the AFM levy include

7130	41,656	5 Red Caps	"No One Else Will Do" / "I'm Crazy about You"
7220	7,463	5 Red Caps	"Get Off That Kick" / "It's Got a Hole in It"
*7123	4,090	5 Red Caps	"Somebody's Lyin'" / "Was It You?"
7170	21,776	Una Mae Carlisle	"Tain't Yours" / "Without You Baby"
7171	19,226	Una Mae Carlisle	"Like It 'Cause I Love It" / "You Gotta Take Your Time"
*8125	10,130	Walter Thomas	"Broke But Happy" / "Blues on the Delta"
8126	7,887	Walter Thomas	"Jumpin' with Judy" / "Blues on the Bayou"
7014	24,698	Will Bradley	"Lightning Boogie" / "Sugar Hill Boogie Woogie"
8190	3,105	Erskine Butterfield	"Lighthouse" / "Part-Time Boogie"
*7015	1,406	Deryck Sampson	"Boogie Express" / "Erin Go Boogie"
7152	2,850	Singin' Sam	"A Message from Home" / "Whenever I Think of You"
7320	38,692	Korn Kobblers	"I Love Her Just the Same" / "Why Does a Bee Like His Honey"

Of all the releases listed here, only those marked with an asterisk had recorded previous sales, which doubtless accounts for low figures on some items, although Walter Thomas's 8125 clearly still sold well, with almost 21,000 having been sold in total. The Will Bradley sold surprisingly well and one can see why Davis stayed with the Una Mae Carlisle contract. The boogie pianists showed low returns, reflecting recent patterns. The large advertisement for the 5 Red Caps with a picture label of JD 7130 plus the caption "advance orders over 100,000 records" in the *New York Enquirer* of July 24 reflect sales for the half-year of only 41,656. This record sold well, even if it wasn't a "hit," and the reasoning behind Davis paying \$2,000 for the Korn Kobblers contract becomes self-evident in light of the fact that their first disc sold nearly 40,000 in less than three months.

Print reviews generally continued to support Davis's releases positively. *The Billboard* for October 28, 1944, mentioned twelve releases, three of which were on Gennett: 5 Red Caps' "Tuscaloosa" (7117), Savannah Churchill's "Two-Faced Man" (7106), and "You Ain't No Good" by Gabriel Brown (5003). Two weeks later it reviewed the 5 Red Caps' "Sugar Lips" / "Gabriel's Band," finding the former "a contagious, rhythmic dish" and the latter, "a lively jump ditty . . . patterned along the lines of the swing spirituals, with the voices and instruments auditioning for the trumpet man's congregation . . . No wastage on either side for the music ops, with both ditties designed for generous spinning at a nickel a whirl."

The last issue of *Variety* for 1944 carried a note that Joe Davis "discings" were to be added to Beacon on January 15. The same issue of *Variety* referenced Armen Camp, noting "his initial sides under the new title." It seemed that one reason Davis added these new "discings" was to give Camp a new label—the Joe Davis label—so that records from January 1945 might be found on Beacon, Celebrity, Gennett, and Joe Davis. If nothing else, it would be impossible not to appreciate the source of the material.



## Chapter Six

# God Bless Our New President

By January 14, 1945, Joe Davis officially reorganized his business as Joe Davis Record Co. doing business at 331 West 51st Street, New York, New York. His January 24, 1945, application with the United States Patent Office showed he had used the name for about ten days and listed his own residence as New Preston, Connecticut. This new name didn't signal a sea change, it merely recognized Davis's current business practices.

In general this merely increased the number of labels on which his releases might be found, but he did reissue both Beverley White Beacons in cross-couplings, both "hits" together and both the original flips on the same disc. His boogie piano star, Deryck Sampson, appeared as a guest on the CBS broadcast, "Music Till Midnight," in New York City on January 12. Unlike some of the guests, however, he failed to be included on the Mildred Bailey AFRS Show, but then the resident pianist was Teddy Wilson. Sampson's status as a recording artist and as a popular entertainer also dimmed and by eighteen he seems then to have slipped from sight as a performer. The more versatile Erskine Butterfield seemingly replaced him in Davis's plans, but six days after the CBS show Davis brought another boogie pianist—Gene Rodgers—into the studio.

Rodgers, however, transcended the "boogie pianist" label. With roots in the vaudeville stage, he had recorded with King Oliver in 1931 and with Benny Carter in 1936 (in London), toured Australia, and arranged for Fats Waller's big band, as well as having played piano on Coleman Hawkins's 1939 hit, "Body and Soul." In two hours on the afternoon of January 18, 1945, he recorded multiple takes—all meticulously executed—of four titles, three of them boogies.

The continued popularity of applying a boogie-woogie underpinning to classics resulted in "Rhapsody Boogie" and "Poet and Peasant Boogie." Rodgers's skills and thorough knowledge of classical music can be heard in the former title, where he builds short quote on top of short quote until

one doubts he can call a halt to it all. He does, with great control and without sounding overly trite. Somewhat easier on the ears are the last two titles recorded: "G.R. Boogie" and "G.R. Blues." Despite the strong level of sophistication, they retain a distinctly grassroots feel. After plans for a session a week earlier at WOR fell through, Davis once again booked the Empire Studio and paid Rodgers \$100.00 for the four titles. Although the contract (secured through the Frederick Bros. Agency) allowed for sixteen titles at \$25.00 each, perhaps Davis felt these were sufficient. He also allocated a new series for Rogers, which commenced—quite mischievously—with Joe Davis 8888.

By the end of January, Davis and the 5 Red Caps acrimoniously parted ways and he even went so far as to take legal action should they perform any of his songs on stage. Shortly thereafter they appeared at the Apollo on West 125th and featured "Boogie Woogie Ball" in their show. Davis quickly wrote Steve Gibson assuring him that he was not legally permitted to perform any Davis-owned tune, and eventually brought suit against the Apollo itself. His Western Union cable confirming his action received a reply on January 30, 1945, that "addressee . . . Steven A. Gibson . . . refused to accept." Davis's actions resulted in two contracts—both signed the same day; one with the 5 Red Caps (comprising only Steve Gibson, James Springs, Romaine Brown, and David Patillo) and one with their agent, Nat Nazarro. The group signed that "in consideration of the sum of one dollar and other good and valuable consideration" they canceled any claim on recordings made "heretofore" whether issued or as yet unissued.

The "consideration" must have been well worthwhile, for by April they returned to the recording studio. Always augmented in the studio by bassist Doles Dickens, they cut a session in each of the next three months until July. Apart from "The Boogie Beat'll Getcha if You Don't Watch Out," the tunes recorded were all ballads and pretty dreary at that. Moreover, Steve Gibson and Romaine Brown, and occasionally Doles Dickens, made up the Park Avenue Trio, which accompanied Bon Bon on half a dozen sessions for Davis in 1945.

By February Davis began a completely new venture in recording: a series of black religious sermons by the Reverend J. C. Burnett. In the late 1920s, Burnett—a very popular recording preacher—completed nine sessions for Columbia. Decca even recorded a session with Burnett in 1939. Davis contacted Burnett early in 1945 and slated a second session at Empire for March 2 at 10:00 A.M. The organist for the session, and quite probably the person who introduced Davis to Burnett, was Porter Grainger, with

whom Davis maintained contact for years, long after first using him on early sessions and publishing some of his tunes. The link possibly goes back to Burnett's first Columbia session in 1926 on which an unidentified organist (perhaps Grainger) appears on several selections.

Burnett recorded two songs and two sermons, although Davis's contract with Burnett stipulated sixteen or more might be recorded over a period of a year. Grainger, at least, must have been happy with the session—apart from getting \$60.00—for he wrote a delightful letter to Davis a few days after the session: “. . . the urge to (write) this, is due to how cleverly you handled the Reverend. Anticipating the probability that something might go wrong, I rehearsed my group so thoroly [*sic*] that they didn't necessarily need their scores . . . This is right from the shoulder and if I didn't think sincerely what I'm saying, I'd just keep quiet. But your smart psychology did the trick, and I feel that after having done many selections with the Rev., the engagement of the other day got a little something that I don't think he has given before.”

Davis, too, must have been pleased with the session for on April 19 Burnett returned to the Empire studio to record four more titles at 10:00 A.M., once more with Grainger on organ. This time Burnett used a six-piece female group, at least one of whom—Anne C. Graham—went on to record again. Graham recorded later that year for Chicago/Harlem (a Mayo Williams group of labels) and in 1950 for Gotham in Philadelphia. Davis released the Reverend J. C. Burnett's sermons on four discs in a new series, 3900, two of which went on sale by early autumn. Whether or not they sold well, Davis declined to exercise his option to record Burnett again. Indeed, in February 1946 Davis bought off the remainder of the contract by paying Burnett \$100.00 plus a \$15.00 fee to Burnett's solicitors. Years later, Davis was still paying royalties to Portia, the daughter of Porter Grainger.

Two days before the second Burnett gospel session, Davis brought quite a different black religious group into the Empire studios to record—a five-man vocal group, the Galilee Singers. Clearly well rehearsed, they cut their four titles—with a number of alternative takes—in one and a half hours. Having commenced a Joe Davis 3900 black gospel series (he also had a 7000 reissue series, plus the 8000s by Jules Bledsoe and an 8900 release by Marian Anderson), the Galilee Singers sides were released on 3950 and 3951, both available by the early autumn together with the Burnetts.

Between recording these religious sides, Davis oversaw a further session by Walter Thomas's All Stars, over lunchtime on March 8. This “new-look” band featured Charlie Shavers on trumpet and a powerful four-man sax

section of Thomas, Ben Webster, Ernie Caceres, and Milt Yaner. Backed by an excellent rhythm section of Billy Taylor on piano, Slam Stewart, and Cozy Cole, they cut Davis's own "Save It, Pretty Mama" and Irene Higginbotham's "Peach Tree Street Blues," "The Bottle's Empty," and "For Lovers Only." Davis changed the names of these last two titles to "400 Bounce" and "Let's Go The Rent's Due," but it is unclear why.

He didn't schedule April 1945 purely for recording black gospel music. Davis recorded Bon Bon with a jazz band and also worked hard to bring two blues pianists who had recorded before the war back into the studio. On April 3, 1945, Davis succeeded in signing Champion Jack Dupree but, for unknown reasons, his attempts to record Cow Cow Davenport proved unsuccessful.

Born in New Orleans in 1910, William Thomas Dupree learned to play piano at an early age but eventually became a professional boxer; the "Jack" probably honoring black boxing hero Jack Johnson. Sometime in the 1930s Dupree stopped in Indianapolis where he met probably the most prolifically recorded blues pianist of his day, Leroy Carr. Dupree took to playing piano once more and eventually came to the notice of Lester Melrose in Chicago, who signed him to record for Okeh in 1940. Melrose oversaw several sessions the following year that resulted in more than a dozen Okeh releases. This period of Dupree's career ended with an army call-up, but in 1945 he returned to civilian life and was looking for work.

Perhaps he came to Joe Davis's attention after recording for Moe Asch's Folkways label; however the two met, Dupree contracted with Davis in April 1945 for sixteen sides "or more than that number if desired by the company." At the same time Dupree received a letter from Local 208, the Chicago branch of the AFM, advising him that their "record shows that you have not paid dues to this local since the 3rd. quarter 1942, in which circumstances to pay in full including the 2nd. quarter 1945 the amount is 49.00. If you wish to pay up in order to resign and join local #802, the amount is 9.25. I hope this is the information that you desire."

Because it meant that Dupree owed Local 208 \$58.25, the news wasn't great but at least it meant that he had settled with 208, which enabled him to sign up with 802 without too much difficulty. Signing with 802 was never easy, as so many musicians flocked to New York City to find work. Once a musician resided in the city, she or he had to play with 802 members only for a period of six months before being permitted to join the union, an arrangement that protected existing 802 members. Non-802 members played on union gigs only if it suited the established musicians,

which allowed them to keep the poorer players away, though it proved difficult for newcomers—as was intended. Perhaps Dupree hoped for a loan from Davis but by a remarkable coincidence, the president of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, helped resolve Dupree's financial dilemma.

On April 12, 1945, Roosevelt died, sending the entire country into mourning. Davis, always quick to release a topical hit, decided to record a tribute to FDR and another to the incoming president, Harry Truman. In view of Roosevelt's positive attitude to poor blacks, who better than to have Jack Dupree, who had just signed with him? Clearly Davis (or perhaps Dupree himself) quickly sorted out matters with Local 802, as four days after Roosevelt's death, Davis signed an AFM contract blank for a session with "William Jack Dupree" in the Empire Studio at 10:00 on the morning of April 18. Dupree could hardly have welcomed the early hour, but then Davis was in a hurry.

Whatever the circumstances, Dupree performed very well cutting eight titles, among them "F.D.R. Blues" and "God Bless Our New President." *The Billboard* for April 28, just ten days after the session, carried an advertisement for this coupling "a new sensational timely blues record." Davis immediately released these topical selections—recorded fifth and sixth at the session—as the third Dupree coupling, as Davis 5102 was issued first. Davis 5100 ("Rum Cola Blues" and "She Makes Good Jelly") didn't reach the public until early September 1945 and the *Chicago Defender* of September 29 carried a one-sixteenth-page advertisement. For these two topical titles (the first recorded), Dupree made complete alternative takes of both, let alone shorter, false starts. Nonetheless, his efficiency and rehearsal were such that he completed his session an hour early, at noon. The original title of the third recorded number had been "Midnight Boogie Woogie" but by the time of its issue in 1946 it had become "Johnson Street Boogie Woogie." It was, however, the only boogie cut that day.

The last pair of titles recorded, "County Jail Special" and "Fisherman's Blues," also saw release in England on the Jazz Parade label. The original recording, Joe Davis 5103, though clearly marked on the label, included "Dec. 1944" as well, which for years led to the incorrect date being given to this session. For his two hours Dupree was to receive \$100.00: "\$54.00 already paid in advance, balance of \$46.00 upon completion of date." Thus it seemed that Davis had provided the bulk of the funds to enable Dupree to switch from local 208 to 802.

Perhaps the most intriguing "might-have-been" session for Davis was that of the highly regarded blues pianist Cow Cow Davenport, whose "Cow

Cow Boogie” was known to every boogie pianist, but tackled well by few. Davenport, writing in April from Cleveland, Ohio, informed Davis that “I have some numbers I would like to get recorded on the Gennett Record Co. All my own original songs . . . Now if this interest[s] you I will make a transcription [*sic*] and send them to you and let you hear them to see if you can use me and my songs for a recording.”

Davenport recorded on Gennett from 1929 and 1930 and his very first issued session had produced such masterpieces as “Chimes Blues,” “Slow Drag,” and “Atlanta Rag.”

Davenport realized that the reactivated Gennett label—maybe even the sides by Big Bill—might reactivate his recording career, too, and his serious inquiry to record was addressed to Davis at Gennett’s Richmond address. Davis wrote back immediately that “if you will let me know just how much you would want for a recording I will be glad to consider same. Each date would consist of four selections—I would also like to know if you are at present under contract to any other record company.” Four days later Davis heard from Davenport, who wrote that he had no other recording contract and would provide eight sides at the AFM rate of \$110.00. The pianist included the rider that these numbers would be “turned over to you for Publisher rites remember these are all original numbers of my own. Of course I would expect Railroad fare and expense while Recording.” Davis replied with three copies of an agreement, pointing out that “if this contract is approved by the A.F. of M., I would like to stop off at Cleveland Tuesday [May 8] on my way to Richmond, Indiana to see you so that I could hear some of your numbers and arrange the numbers I would like to use for the recording.” Davis signed off in a friendly yet urgent manner “with kindest personal regards, and hoping to receive the signed contracts by return mail.” The contracts were duly signed and returned, together with Cleveland AFM Local 550 approval.

However, the New York City AFM intervened because Davis wrote one contract to cover both recordings and song rights. Mr. Ricardi, Petrillo’s assistant at Local 802, intimated that a separate contract should be drawn up for the songs, which the local AFM would then approve. Davis immediately mailed back the signed contracts with deletions for Davenport’s signature along with a separate song-writing agreement, and a promise to contact Davenport regarding a session as soon as the AFM approved the amendments. The following day Davenport returned all the documents “hoping they will be Okeh so I can get going again.” These next-day returns of mail prove that both men were eager to bring about a session.

Once again Davis seemed unable to work out a contract to his liking with the AFM. He wrote Davenport on June 1, 1945: "For reasons that I can't explain very well through a letter, I do not care to sign the new Union contract with you, but I will have to sign another contract with you, strictly as an artist and not musician. I am going to Richmond Monday night [June 4] and will be back Friday, but if you will be in town Monday, I will be only too pleased to see you. Otherwise we will have to make it Friday [June 8] if you are in town."

On June 5 Davenport replied:

I couldn't make my trip to New York but I am sending one of my transcriptions recording I hope you will rec. it. Now this recording of me and my boy I write them and he play them for me, he wants to join me as my pianist so I told [him] I would do a recording and let you hear us together, and I work with this boy and he understand my stuff.

He is Okeh with the union to do us . . . so you can make us a combined contract together his name is Doc Wiley.

Now let me hear from you at once.

Neither the transcription disc Davenport referenced nor any further correspondence between the two men turned up in Davis's archive and files. There were acetates from Cleveland, but none by Davenport and Wiley. Davenport's reference to Wiley as "his boy" is amusing because Wiley recorded for Okeh one year before Davenport's first Paramount recordings were released in 1927. However, Davenport had recorded before Wiley—for Gennett as it happens, in Richmond in 1925—but the titles never were released. He therefore considered himself the more mature recording artist. Wiley eventually recorded for Brunswick, Paramount, and Columbia before World War II and saw releases on half a dozen labels postwar, including Chicago. Perhaps coincidentally, a number of artists associated with Davis recorded in 1945–1946 for the Chicago label—Anne C. Graham, Betty Thornton, and Lawrence "88" Keyes among them. Whatever happened regarding the Davis-Davenport deal will almost certainly never be known.

### Back to Familiar Territory

On the strength of an incipient hit with "Truthfully," Bon Bon returned to the studio on April 16, 1945. The *New York Enquirer* of March 12 announcing

that Davis had “snared another coin-box winner in Bon Bon and ‘Truthfully,’” further informed readers that the singer had formerly performed with the Three Keys and Jan Savitt. In August Davis wrote to Pfc. Erskine Butterfield at Camp Lee that he had “another big record in ‘Truthfully’ recorded by Bon Bon and it looks as though it will be terrific because sales are getting bigger all the time.” Back on April 16 at the Empire Studio, however, Davis was aiming at quite a different sound for Bon Bon.

Possibly inspired by Bob Haggart’s little jazz band that backed Una Mae Carlisle the previous summer, Davis engaged Haggart to rustle up a sextet for the session. Indeed, along with Haggart, trombonist Vernon Brown and clarinetist Bill Stegmeyer made this date. Dave Bowman served as the pianist, while trumpeter Yank Lawson led the group. Forty years later Yank could not even recall the session so perhaps Haggart again intended to use Billy Butterfield, who canceled at the last minute. Star trumpeter Yank Lausen (as he was properly named on the AFM sheet) played in the popular Bob Crosby band and emerged as the most logical replacement for Butterfield.

Along with the other sidemen he collected his \$30.00 for the session, which cut four titles: “Most Emphatic’lly Yes,” “We Need Each Other,” “I’m Not Ashamed,” and “Julia.” The latter, coauthored by Eddie Mallory, served as a feature for the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra, which received front billing on the 1940 Georgia Music sheet music. In fact, Dorsey recorded it for Decca that year but it remained one of his very few unissued Decca titles. Earl Hines had recorded “Julia” as early as March 1934.

The sheet music to “Julia” called it a “sweet rhythm song” but this belies the up-tempo pace with which Haggart’s band tackled it, with a nice lead-in from Bowman. Bon Bon shows he could swing well enough and the band really cooks in the middle. Lawson’s firm lead dictates throughout and Haggart’s bass is especially well recorded. A number of alternative takes of all the titles survive, and it is odd to hear that of the two versions of “We Need Each Other,” Davis chose to issue the one with the only clinker that Lawson played on the session! However, Bon Bon sings it very well with trumpet over a sprightly bass line from Haggart and a characteristically pretty solo from clarinetist Stegmeyer. The real swinger from the session—the catchy “Most Emphatic’lly Yes” delights with its neat “absotively, posolutely, most emphatic’lly yes” refrain. Unfortunately this well-executed session was utterly unlike any other Bon Bon date, which is a great shame.

Davis scheduled further Bon Bon sessions on May 14, June 26, July 2, and July 3, July 17, August 14, and September 17, 1945, all backed by the



Park Avenue Trio, essentially a *nom de plume* for the 5 Red Caps rhythm section: Steve Gibson on guitar, Romaine Brown on piano, and Doles Dickens on bass. For the last two sessions, Israel Crosby took over from Dickens; for these sessions, too, Davis tried to get eight titles from double sessions. Although the AFM contract forbade such moves, the fact that he paid double rates for the August session (Gibson \$120.00 and the other two \$60.00 each) underscores Davis's attempt to squeeze extra songs out of this session.

The September effort ground to a halt after six titles were recorded and Davis never re-allocated the 7213 release number provisionally allocated to the intended seventh and eighth titles. This mammoth session began at 6:00 P.M. but the rhythm section had arrived at 3:00 P.M. in order to accompany a different combo. It is hardly surprising that, after ten titles with many alternative takes and false starts, the session ground to a halt before the projected final two titles could be made. Thus the thirty-four Bon Bon sides from the summer sessions were largely musically unmemorable. The July 2 session produced a jaunty up-tempo "Riffin' with the Riff Raff" (ala Slim and Slam), but other than a few gentle-paced numbers like "Crystal Gazin' Mama" and "You'd Better Stop Playing with Fire," both from the August sessions, the others remain utterly forgettable.

While Davis attempted to complete his deal with Cow Cow Davenport, he brought Gabriel Brown back into the studios, although he already had a dozen titles unreleased. His faith in producing a hit from Brown must have been immense, for he paid out \$100.00 for each of two sessions at Empire Studio on May 2, 1945, that produced eight titles. The second title Brown recorded, "It's Getting Soft," clearly appealed to Davis, who immediately scheduled it (backed by "Don't Worry about It") for a June 11 shipping date as Joe Davis 5020. Davis so firmly believed in the potential of "It's Getting Soft" that he promoted it as the A side, even printing up postcards of a man leading a busty female into a motel, saying "Hurry up honey, it's getting soft!" while carrying a bucket of ice cream. It was no more and no less than had been visible in English seaside postcards for years.

As if this was not enough, Brown returned to the Empire Studio once more on June 27, 1945, to cut a further four titles for \$100.00, which resulted in twenty unreleased titles. Only one, "That's Alright," was never released by Davis, although it did reach the public via a long-play album released on Krazy Kat in the 1980s. Davis issued the last four titles from the May session and all four titles from the June session in a four-78 disc album in 1946, which must have sold poorly because so few copies survive.

*The Billboard* eventually carried a Davis advertisement for “Boogie Woogie Guitar” and “Hold That Train,” the other coupling from May, which was released as Joe Davis 5021; as it happened, the last release numerically, although earlier couplings trickled out for some little time. “Something different in the blues line . . . His best by far.” Though it broke no new ground, Davis 5021—a good coupling—typified the high quality of recordings Brown made for Joe Davis.

On June 26 Walter Thomas entered the Empire Studio in the early afternoon for what turned out to be his final session for Davis. This time the sax section had increased to five; the others were old buddies from earlier sessions, Eddie Barefield and Hilton Jefferson, plus Buddy Saffer and Teddy McRae. Doc Cheatham, who had acquitted himself so well on the abortive final Una Mae Carlisle session, handled the trumpet. This strong line of jazz stalwarts enjoyed an excellent rhythm section comprised of Billy Taylor on piano, Milt Hinton on bass, and Specs Powell on drums. The ensemble recorded four titles, “Black Maria’s Blues,” “Dee-Tees,” “Bird Brain,” and “Back Talk,” but only the first two were ever released contemporaneously on 78—the others eventually appeared on album for the first time in the 1970s. Perhaps due to the increasing impact of bop musicians like Charlie Parker, these compositions certainly sound more “modern” than the mainstream recordings at earlier sessions. When Davis produced a four-78 disc album by Walter Thomas, he chose the issued coupling from this session, which sound less radical, to complete the set.

Davis advertised heavily in June, taking two half-page ads opposite one another in *The Billboard* promoting the 5 Red Caps’ “I’m to Blame” and “Boogie Woogie on a Saturday Nite [*sic*]” along with Bon Bon’s “Truthfully,” which was beginning to break out. Two weeks later he took the entire page 12 in the *Chicago Defender* with photographs to plug each of the thirteen artists represented in the ad. It seems an odd number for Davis to have advertised together, suggesting that he was no stranger to superstition. After all, he prefaced his various series with a 7, released Wingy Manone’s first disc as 7777 (surely to their mutual amusement), and in the 1950s instigated his Jay-Dee label at 777. He even issued Clayton McMichen as 7011—7 and 11.

Whatever motivated Davis, his advertisement plugged Una Mae Carlisle (7172), Gabriel Brown, “Mr. Blues Himself” (5008), Bon Bon (7191), Erskine Butterfield (8191), Champion Jack Dupree (5103), Walter Thomas (8129), Maxine Sullivan (7420), Coleman Hawkins Quintet (8250), Richard Huey and Jubileers (7002), Rev. J. C. Burnett (3901), Gene Rodgers (8888),

Deryck Sampson (7016), and in the very middle, stretching from side to side, the 5 Red Caps 7133 of “I’m to Blame” and “Boogie Woogie on a Saturday Night.” Every record is on the Joe Davis label and each is in its own artist’s series; Bon Bon began at 7190 and Butterfield at 8190. Despite the fact that down-home southern blacks would once have played “Ida Red” and “Old Joe Clark” in string bands, Davis didn’t advertise his new Clayton McMichen in the *Chicago Defender*. Davis also remained in touch with artists he had recorded in the past, a fact underscored when he registered an unpublished tune, “Throw It Out of Your Mind,” with words by Andy Razaf and music by Una Mae Carlisle.

On July 3 Wingy Manone’s band trooped into the studio for an 8:00 P.M. session, which suited them far better than their last Davis outing that began in the morning. George Wettling alone survived from the earlier band but Manone had otherwise assembled a fine group featuring Ward Silloway on trombone, Hank D’Amico (clarinet), and tenor saxophonist Nick Caiazza. Dave Bowman (piano) and Bob Haggart on bass completed the rhythm section. This time there was no guitarist. They merrily cut four titles, including complete alternative takes on all but “Mr. Boogie Man”; a pity, as that Irene Higginbotham tune proved the most interesting. Their first effort at “Georgia Gal” produced just one fluffed note from Manone before the band bursts into laughter and D’Amico hits a flat note on clarinet as a retort. An exasperated Manone calls out, “I can’t see that light!” which sounds more like an excuse than an explanation. The other titles were “That’s a Gasser,” with its hip jargon, and a rather obvious—though admittedly well-done—“Where Can I Find a Cherry.” The band, however, remains at ease and swings its numbers well.

The obvious high quality of “Mr. Boogie Man” doubtless lies in Irene Higginbotham’s haunting, catchy melody, which deserves rediscovery by a Dixieland band. Apparently she didn’t write it specifically for Manone as the original Higginbotham lyrics read:

Meet Mr. Boogie Man  
 He comes from spooky land  
 And plays a piano, man  
 In a righteous and a knocked-out boogie band.

For Manone’s vocal she tailors and personalizes the middle two lines:

Meet Mr. Boogie Man  
 He comes from Creole lan’

An' plays a trumpet, man!  
In a righteous and a knocked-out boogie band.

That's an excellent description of this little band, given the prevalent hip use of opposites to create an adulatory statement.

Unfortunately for Irene Higginbotham, at the time of the session she had fallen ill with food poisoning. She wrote to Davis on July 8: "I'd appreciate if you still have that work for me, to drop it in the mail, as I could do it easily while convalescing . . . I certainly could use a little check." The illness proved more serious than it seemed at first for in August Higginbotham wrote Davis from St. Luke's Hospital in New York saying that she would send him the manuscripts he had sent her to work on. "If you can use them . . . OK if not, just save them for me." Davis apparently told her of his plan to issue the first of the new Manone discs for she added, "If you have records of 'That's A Gasser' [Wingy Manone: Joe Davis 7779] and 'Black Maria's' ['Black Maria's Blues' by Walter Thomas on Joe Davis 8131] could you mail me them . . . my head nurse seems to be interested."

Davis had not yet reached "Black Maria's Blues" in his issue plans as Walter Thomas's "Peach Tree Street Blues" and "Save It, Pretty Mama" (Joe Davis 8129) was released at the start of July. The same batch included a repackaged coupling of the 1942 Savannah Churchill sides, on Gennett 7104 and Gennett 7106—cross-coupling the original Beacon issues. Churchill's Gennett 7106 had been advertised in *The Billboard* in October 1944. Manor Record advertised their own new Savannah Churchill release of "Daddy Daddy," by coincidence on the back of the page in *The Billboard* for June 2, which carried a Bon Bon advertisement for Davis. Doubtless this marked a propitious moment for Davis to relaunch or readvertise his titles. On July 28 *The Billboard* carried a full-page advertisement for Davis's records, this time offering a mail-order service. Quite possibly he received so many private inquiries that he decided he might as well sell direct.

By September, however, he began offering "Black Maria's Blues" along with his very full and wide-ranging catalogue, the highlight of which were fourteen discs by the 5 Red Caps and half that by Bon Bon, including a coupling recorded in August (although none of the April jazz-accompanied sides had yet been released). Music enthusiasts could purchase any of the six records available by "Sir Walter Thomas and His All Stars" and Gabriel Brown, or the five discs by Una Mae Carlisle and Deryck Sampson.

Surprisingly, the largest category of records available was "Hill Country Records," followed by eight of "Spirituals." Even the titles by pop singer

Jerry Wayne, which had brought Davis into the business initially, remained available, though once more the original Beacon releases had been cross-coupled. Joe Davis 7108, "Indiana Blues," had once been Beacon 100. An August flier promised Joe Davis 3602—Irish folk music by William Quinn, the third in that series, while October 1, 1945, brought the promised shipping date for three records by the Quintet [sic] of the Hot Club of France. They must have sold well for Davis ordered a further 5,000 pairs of labels of the first coupling, "Tiger Rag" and "Lady Be Good" on Joe Davis 8003. The other couplings were 8004 and 8005; a seeming departure from Davis's normal number sequences, for 8001 and 8002 had been spirituals by Jules Bledsoe. However those, like the Quintette of the Hot Club of France titles, had been bought from Ultraphone material held by Record Syndicate Trust. Perhaps this is why they remained in the same series but, whatever the explanation, it broke with Davis tradition.

A September 17, 1945, session, anchored by the solid rhythm section of Steve Gibson, Romaine Brown, and Israel Crosby and fronted by Walter Thomas began at 3:00 P.M., which probably prevented the following double session by Bon Bon from completing all eight titles. The session produced four titles that Davis eventually issued on Joe Davis 6666 and 6667 as by the Magnolia Five, the fifth man being Reginald W. Merrill—a remarkably unlikely choice. Perhaps Merrill arrived as a late AFM replacement (Davis's own notes to the session list his tardiness), but he had an excellent grounding. He'd recorded on clarinet and tenor sax with Irving Aaronson in the early to mid-1930s and on alto sax and clarinet on four different sessions for Vocalion in 1939, including one for Maxine Sullivan. Merrill later played reeds in the Mark Warnow Orchestra, which recorded in New York in February 1942 for RCA, in a section headed and arranged by Benny Carter. He shared alto sax parts with Hymie Schertzer (probably as good then as anyone as an alto sax leader/reader), in Benny Goodman's All-Star Band on the NBC broadcast of July 31, 1944, that soon appeared on a V-Disc. Judging from some of that personnel, he might just have been an NBC staffer. It's anyone's guess who plays which reed instrument on this session for Walter Thomas could triple on clarinet, alto, or tenor sax. A baritone sax is audible on the session but neither appears to have recorded on that instrument, although Walter Thomas did once record on bass sax, auspiciously with Jelly Roll Morton's Levee Serenaders version of "Midnight Mama" for Vocalion in 1928.

Intiguingly, Davis cut sides by a trio at the Empire Studio in March 1945, following a note in the *New York Enquirer* of March 12 that Davis

had “slipped out of town last week and signed the Magnolia Trio [and] plans to give them a nation wide build-up.” The group he recorded featured Davis’s old colleague from Ajax days in the 1920s, Elmer Snowden, on guitar, along with pianist Marjorie Wood, and Charles Lee (bass). No releases ever materialized, although the four sides were allocated release numbers of 7820 and 7822—no 7821 has ever been traced. Two of these unissued titles, “It Hurts Me But I Like It” and “Ouch,” were recorded at the September Magnolia Five session. The other titles cut in September were “Don’t Come Cryin’ to Me” and “If You Can’t Get Five, Take Two,” numbers reminiscent of the earlier, jivey 5 Red Caps songs. Amazingly and unaccountably, in 1954 Davis reissued two of these titles under Steve Gibson’s name, one from each of the original Magnolia Five couplings.

Thomas recorded no more for Davis and ran his “[Teaching] Saxophone Studio” at 117 West 48th Street in New York, although he was living then over in Englewood, New Jersey. Reggie Merrill turned up later in the year playing reeds in Mitch Miller’s Orchestra, which backed Frank Sinatra on Columbia. These two stories illustrate Joe Davis’s centrality in the New York City music and recording scene well into the 1950s.

Less than ten days after the Magnolia Five recording date, Davis produced a session at the Empire Studio, the only evidence for which is a letter to the Escrow Department of the AFM, which ran as follows: “I am enclosing herewith checks for the following for the transcription recording date we did Friday, September 26th at the Empire Broadcasting Corp. from 2:00 P.M. to 4:45 P.M. Willis E. Kelly, Henry Wm. Rowland, Charles H. Barber, Salvatore Pace, Robert Louis McGarity, John Tom Cali, Fud Livingston.” No known recording fits this group, and although only the last three names are of significance to jazz enthusiasts, the presence of that remarkable clarinetist Fud Livingston leads one to wonder what sort of music they recorded.

Livingston fell on hard times since his return to New York from a long Hollywood stint and perhaps this was one more example of Davis helping an old buddy. The presence of trombonist Lou McGarity and veteran banjo player John Cali makes the session even more improbable. However, one undated session could accommodate both these men, but there is no clarinet audible.

Celebrity 2000 and 2001 comprised a two-disc album (the first—and possibly only—Celebrity album of 78s) by Al Bernard’s Merry Minstrel Show. Taking part are the Hometown Minstrel Band and the Sunflower Quartet, including Henry Shope (tenor) along with Al Bernard and Tom

Shirley as the interlocutor. Shope performs “Truthfully” (the Bon Bon disc was reissued on the Celebrity label) and the next instrumental number is introduced by the announcer, probably Shirley: “And here we have our slippery sliding trombonist who slides away with ‘Trombone Jitters.’” After which Al Bernard says, “Man didn’t that boy slide dat trambone?” The very competent trombonist is backed only by a banjo and a trumpet. It would explain the banjo and trombone—Lou McGarity later recorded a jazz version for Davis in March 1954 with Lee Castle’s Dixieland band. Some copies of the Minstrel Show album had stickers attached to the front that stated:

THE CUT ON THIS ALBUM IS A TUNE INTERPRETATION OF  
“TROMBONE JITTERS” WHILE THE LEE CASTLE VERSION IS A  
JAZZ INTERPRETATION.

Thus Davis kept the minstrel show album in print as late as 1954, and may have written this simply because Lou McGarity was playing both solos. Could the Sunflower Quartet have comprised Kelly, Rowland, Barber, and Pace, whose names had been returned to the AFM? But what became of Fud Livingston on the 1945 session?

Whatever Davis cut with Fud Livingston, Davis returned to the same studio the following day with Jack Dupree, who racked off four titles in two hours. Even though once more there were alternative takes of three titles, he nailed “Gin Mill Sal” in a single take. That is rather unfortunate as it is an excellent example of New Orleans–style piano, reminding one that Dupree’s significance as a New Orleans pianist remains sadly undervalued. A variant of his OKeh “Junker Blues” later became known worldwide when Fats Domino recorded it as “The Fat Man.”

This September session with Dupree was reminiscent of Davis’s behavior in recording bluesman Gabriel Brown. He continued to record the pianist even though he had many unissued titles. Davis recorded four more titles from Dupree on August 14, 1945, at which Dupree managed to complete all four titles to Davis’s satisfaction in just one hour. It made no financial difference to Dupree, who still received \$100.00 for the session, which had been originally slotted for July 23 but then canceled. By the time of his third Jack Dupree release in early September, Davis retained six unreleased titles, which quickly grew to ten. Davis recorded even more early in 1946.

By the end of September 1945 Davis’s catalogue consisted of 107 records and at the end of the quarter he had sold a total of 257,811



records, with nearly 100,000 in August alone. By far the best seller was the 5 Red Caps' Joe Davis 7133 "I'm to Blame" / "Boogie Woogie on a Saturday Night" with sales of over 16,000, with three of their others selling over 4,000 each. The second-best seller was Bon Bon's "Truthfully" (Joe Davis 7192) at 15,753, but remarkably, the first release by Coleman Hawkins's Quartet (Joe Davis 8250) had chalked up sales of almost 9,000 in that quarter, to gain third place. A couple of Hawaiian guitar solos by Roy Smeck (Joe Davis 4500) just edged out a 5 Red Caps disc into fourth place, with sales of 7,757. Gabriel Brown's "It's Getting Soft" (Joe Davis 5020) sold over 7,000 and the other five Gabriel Browns reached the 16,000 level between them. Two Jack Dupree discs had sold around 5,000 copies each—Joe Davis 5100 sold 4,860 in September alone—but surprisingly Davis sold only 420 copies of "F.D.R. Blues" / "God Bless Our New President." The two Will Bradley records continued to sell—over 10,000 copies between them. The Manones fared far less well, with only 2,000 sold of the first issue and 993 of the second; although it only came out that month, it sold even more slowly over the next three months. Una Mae Carlisle's five discs sold over 16,000 copies between them. Instructively, over 5,000 copies of Clayton McMichen's "Red Wing" / "Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane" were sold in just two months, followed by 4,000 units of "Ida Red" / "Old Joe Clark." Even the less well-known Kentucky Mountaineers sold 4,000, almost all of them in the last month. The Galilee Singers' "Traveling Shoes" / "Before This Time Another Year" reached the 4,000 unit level as well.

Not everything sold well, however. His Irish records sold uniformly slowly and, perhaps predictably, his Marian Anderson sold only 317. Some of the early releases, which enjoyed good runs on Beacon, still sold well; Dolores Brown (Joe Davis 7110) sold almost 1,000 and the two repackaged Savannah Churchills sold just over 3,600 between them. In two months one of the repackaged Beverley Whites (Joe Davis 7111, "If Things Don't Get Better" / "My Baby Comes First with Me") topped 2,500.

After these excellent sales, the year disappointingly tapered away for Davis. October sales dropped 50 percent to just over 62,000 discs while the next two months managed only 50 percent of that between them. Bon Bon's "Truthfully" (JD 7192) sold nearly 9,000 but only two 5 Red Caps and a Jack Dupree (Joe Davis 5100) showed sales in excess of 3,000 each. The total sales for this final quarter were only 108,301, although this brought sales in the last half of 1945 to well over a third of a million; hardly a poor effort, but it foreshadowed the road ahead.



The year ended with Davis block-registering 117 titles with the Registrar of Copyright in Washington, D.C., including many gospel titles. One improbable letter on file among Davis's effects was written early in November by the "Taps" Agency, which specialized in Orchestras and Entertainers *For Radio, Stage and Screen*. Mr. Taps wrote:

Dear Joe:-

Have some records here that I think might interest you. This chap "FRANK EDWARDS" made them for OKEH a few years ago. A very talented young colored boy - singer - guitar player - harmonica player. Left New York for the South a while back, and has not returned since.

Would sincerely appreciate your kindness in giving Mr. Edwards a thought, and advising me of your decision. I will send the records over, if you like. Joe

How on earth a country bluesman like Frank Edwards ever came to be on Taps's books and why Taps owned Edwards's 1941 OKEH releases remains an enigma. Edwards, an archetypal blues migrant, had worked his way to Chicago with Mississippi bluesman Tommy McClennan. In Chicago, Edwards met Frank Melrose, who set up a session for OKEH in May 1941, for whom he cut eight titles backed by washboard player Robert Brown, better known as Washboard Sam. Two titles were released in August 1941 and a further two in December, but the others never were released, quite possibly because of the outbreak of war. Edwards moved back to Atlanta where he lived for decades until his death March 22, 2002, at the age of ninety-three.

At no time did Edwards mention being in New York and he certainly never gave the impression of having been booked through such a prestigious organization as Taps. A quiet, dignified man who aged well, Edwards was thirty-six when Taps called him "young." Presumably Taps had come by a number of his OKEH releases—which cannot have sold well in 1941 and 1942 anyway—and was using them for publicity. The latent impression is that, had Davis been interested, Taps could have arranged a deal between Davis and Edwards.

As it happened, and quite independently, Edwards recorded later in the 1940s, when Fred Mendelsohn of Regal went to Atlanta in 1949 to record blues. Mendelsohn's session with Blind Willie McTell, in particular, documented the thriving Atlanta scene. Although Regal issued some strong performances from these sessions, the only songs that Edwards played in

the studio in 1949 languished unheard until the 1960s before being released on albums. Perhaps Davis thought that Gabriel Brown and Jack Dupree, as southern bluesmen, were sufficient for his catalogue. It is our loss, for we have only these six released titles, prior to Edwards's rediscovery in 1971 and subsequent recordings for Trix Records, upon which to assess this most interesting performer.

## Chapter Seven

# Caribbean Music and Albums

The rapidly dwindling sales of November and December 1945 continued into 1946. Davis eventually realized that this trend didn't merely represent a seasonal drop, but that the bottom had begun to fall out of the market. Perhaps sensing these impending changes early on, Davis slated only one session, by the 5 Red Caps, during the first two months of 1946. The sales of 13,598 for the month of January 1946 signaled a slight rise over December 1945. Only the 5 Red Caps with their "Boogie Beat'll Getcha" (Joe Davis 7135) sold over 1,000 copies, though only barely. Of the rest of the catalogue, only four sold over 500; two by Bon Bon ("Truthfully" and "Julia"), one by Gabriel Brown (Joe Davis 5017), and one by the Korn Kobblers. Beverley White's Joe Davis 7111, which sold 2,500 in August and September alone, now moved only 14 units. Davis sold 3,600 copies of the two Savannah Churchill releases during the September quarter but rang up only 36 sales in January. Similarly, the surprisingly fast-selling Coleman Hawkins Joe Davis 8250, which had totaled 9,000 in the previous quarter, plummeted to 106 copies.

The steep and sudden decline in sales signaled a sea change for independent record companies, but then, what alternative existed but continuing on the same path? Dozens of small independents did not change policy and folded before the 1940s were ended. Davis, as at other times in his career, saw new possibilities and changed course.

Before he consciously shifted gears Davis continued to set up recording sessions because he simply couldn't cease producing records, nor did he wish to do so. The recession in the record business *might* prove temporary and he was unlikely to abandon ship at the first opportunity. In fact, over the next twenty years, Davis moved in and out of the recording business as financial considerations or occasional whimsy took him.

With the addition of vocalist Emmett Matthews, Davis's first Red Caps session for 1946 featured a sextet for the first time. Matthews had

recorded two sessions for Vocalion in 1936 heading a group of Fats Waller alumni, but had cut his first side in 1931 for Paramount. By 1946 he was doubling on soprano sax, although he never played one on a Davis session. The group was unable to complete the four scheduled tunes in the three hours and had to clock up an hour's overtime to 11:00 P.M. The session produced "I Love an Old Fashioned Song," almost in barbershop harmony, plus an excellent, gently swinging "Atlanta G.A." In its *To Keep Your Eye On* column, the *New York Enquirer* for April 8, 1946, highlighted it as a tune to watch.

A few days before the 5 Red Caps session the music publisher, Joseph M. Davis, won election to ASCAP. Possibly sensing the downward trend in sales, Davis once again changed his business name and as of February 1, 1946, he began trading as Davis Records. The name change enabled—and perhaps emboldened—him to move from marketing single discs into packaging and marketing them as albums. Davis produced about three dozen sets of 78 albums over the coming months, some from existing masters, others by purchasing "new" material. As a result of this shift in his business plan, many of the remaining sessions of 1946 were geared simply toward producing discs for planned albums.

As it happened, merely moving into albums of music, identical or at least similar to that which he had already assembled, failed to solve the underlying problem: falling record sales. Davis soon discovered that the album business didn't solve his problems because he had to spend so much in the initial outlay to distributors, many of whom suffered their own economic ills and often failed to meet their financial obligations to him. He would not be the last independent record producer to feel the squeeze when a distributor defaulted on payment. With the extra costs of packaging albums, not to say shipping difficulties, Davis's pre-sale expenses grew but with only minimal returns.

Before he fully appreciated that the 78 album was not to be his panacea, he made one more valuable contact. In March 1946 he signed writer contracts with Jaime Yamin of 519 West 134th Street, New York City, and later that month added Yamin's "Cuando Estas A Mi Lado" to his stable of songs. Davis quickly discovered the potential of tapping into the growing Spanish market.

Sensing a new opportunity, Davis expanded his business toward Spanish vocal and instrumental music initially aimed at the large audience in New York. Within a year, however, Davis spread his net as far south as the Caribbean and northern South America. Yamin, a Cuban who proved

crucial to this shift, spearheaded this side of Davis's operations from his Havana business base. By the summer of 1946 Davis set up Caribbean Music Inc. at the 331 West 51st, New York City address with himself as president and Jaime Yamin as general manager. The attractive letterhead included every Latin American flag, in color, down the left-hand side and along the bottom. It's impossible not to look at anything typed on this eye-catching letterhead. As 1946 progressed Davis appraised the declining single-disc sales and moved in a two-pronged approach toward Spanish vocal discs and 78 albums. Surely one would work, if not both. By the end of 1946 the Spanish angle won.

Before Davis fully invested himself with this new Spanish project, however, he not surprisingly kept pushing his existing product. On February 26 he ordered up 5,000 pairs of labels for a Gabriel Brown release "I'm Gonna Take It Easy" and "Not Now, I'll Tell You When," which coupled two of the three remaining unreleased titles from the September 1944 session. Of course, it was to be the first Gabriel Brown release on the new Davis label and became Davis 5015, the only Gabriel Brown issue on the Davis 5000 series. There were to be four other pairs of couplings packaged in a four-78 album set.

Although they retained their matrix numbers (5022A, etc.) the labels simply carried what was to be the standard Davis release figures of album number and side in the album. Thus matrix 5022B was released as Davis DA 5-8; the eighth title in Davis album DA 5. Davis issued the remaining four titles from the May 1945 session plus all four titles from the June 1945 session for the album set, thereby using eight unreleased masters. The order for the Davis 5015 labels utilized an attractive Gennett Records notepaper, above which was printed *Joe Davis Exclusive Distributor for*, just to keep the name in the public eye. He asked that proofs (and invoices) be sent to New York—to Davis—and that the labels be shipped to Richmond, Indiana, for Gennett to press the disc.

March 1946 produced a small flurry of sessions as Davis prepared to change direction. Indeed, it is most probable that at the time of the first of these sessions, Davis remained undecided what to do, for at the foot of his notes to the Bon Bon session of March 6 was a scribbled note: "March 19 Tues 2 to 5; 20 Wed 4.30; 21 Thurs 4.30," suggesting that he had plans to bring Bon Bon and his trio back into the studios on those dates. In fact, on March 19 Bon Bon visited the studio, while one day later the two-hour session began at 4:30 P.M. and featured the 5 Red Caps. No session occurred on March 21.

Soon after that March 6 Bon Bon session Davis must have decided to break with the past, for the mid-March Bon Bon and 5 Red Caps sessions were their last for Davis. This contentious, problematic situation affected all of the parties involved. During their partnerships Bon Bon cut fifty-four titles for Davis, while the 5 Red Caps waxed ten more than the singer. Moreover the 5 Red Caps backed Bon Bon on all but the jazz band session and these two March 1946 sessions.

For some reason the March 6 Empire Studio Bon Bon session utilized a different backing group, though still a trio. The pianist, ex-Original Memphis 5 stalwart Frank Signorelli, joined the guitarist and veteran session man from the 1920s, Andy Sanella. Robert Michelson rounded out the trio on bass. Davis meticulously noted that the session (probably slotted for a 2:00 P.M. start) began at 2:35 P.M., presumably because the rhythm section arrived a bit late. The same trio then appeared at the next Bon Bon session, so they must have appealed to Davis. The music, however, did not.

The 5 Red Caps (all six of them) session produced another solid set of four selections. This time they featured heart-rending ballads. "Have a Heart for Someone Who Has a Heart for You," "If I'm in the Way," "I May Forgive, But How Can I Forget," and "Confused." Surprisingly, hillbilly singer Roy Acuff later recorded the third title for OKeh.

One other March session occurred before Davis shifted direction. On March 4 he sent a telegram to Jack Dupree at his West 139th Street, New York City address, asking him, "please telephone me immediately." He must have complied, for he was recording for Davis on March 7 at Empire at 4:30 P.M. Davis requested that Dupree extend their contract for another year beginning April 3, which had obviously suited Dupree, especially as "the rate of compensation shall be at the increased rate of payment as set forth in the said paragraph." That part of the agreement didn't survive among Davis's papers and the AFM sheet shows that he earned \$100.00 for the session, though it seems that more must have been paid. Maybe Dupree struck a tough bargain.

With seemingly little effort Dupree put down four titles that day: "Love Strike Blues," "Wet Deck Mama," "Big Legged Mama," and "I'm a Doctor for Women." Three full takes survived of the last title, plus a false start. Even if the other three titles went down in one take, completing a four-tune session in forty-five minutes is not only a considerable achievement, it also underscores the rapport between the two men as well as Dupree's professionalism.

"Love Strike Blues," sung over a lovely rolling bass figure, has his woman on strike, picketing outside his house.

My baby wants lovin'  
On the Union plan,  
She likes that overtime,  
And don't want no part-time man.

The revelation of the session, however, is a short seventeen seconds-long false start to "I'm a Doctor for You." Having recorded an overlong first take of nearly three and a half minutes (many takes were rejected simply because they were too long for a 78—others were incomplete for the same reason, as Davis stopped the machine), Dupree dropped into a superb New Orleans rhythm, only to have it cut short. It probably was not what Davis wanted, but what a shame he didn't let it finish. However, we are only able to know of its existence because he saved what he had recorded, so he clearly maintained a sense of posterity.

This session proved to be Dupree's last for Davis, too. "Love Strike Blues" and "Wet Deck Mama" naturally came out on the Davis label (Davis 5108) but the other coupling was not released for two years—as *Celebrity* 2012. In July 1946 Dupree wrote to Davis stating that he had some more good numbers—such as "Wine Drinker Blues," "Hard Working Woman Blues," and "Boogie Woogie Train"—ready to record as well as an unnamed female blues singer. But it was too late because of the market shift.

A year earlier and Davis would at least have listened to her, given his history of recording female singers. As it was, the letter arrived just after he had recorded his second session with a polka band and just before he was about to record a black female singer, Betty Thornton. As happened so frequently in musicians' dealings with Davis, Dupree did not totally vanish from his life. As late as 1959 they signed an agreement for a 50-50 split on rights to a tune, "The Same Old Beat."

Despite falling sales Davis continued recording popular music because placing a hit like "I Learned a Lesson I'll Never Forget" by the 5 Red Caps, which he shrewdly placed with Robbins Music to increase its promotion, doubtless helped him sell some 5 Red Caps discs on the Robbins coattails. Thus in late March and early April he produced a session of popular titles by the Henry Jerome Orchestra and a final session with Harry Frankel (Singin' Sam), which produced "Sleepy-Time in Caroline," and "Dreamy Housatonic," both owned by Davis. These two selections provide evidence of some of the underlying reasoning behind these popular sessions. With Frankel's vocal backed by a trio including Frank Signorelli and Andy Sanella, the Singin' Sam session sounded like 1926 all over again. Davis

added organist Frank Banta, whose recorded legacy dated as far back as Frank Signorelli's, for this session. Frankel's last time in the studio might have been less a planned final session than an outcome of the imminent collapse of the Davis-Gennett deal.

By March 14, 1946, Davis concluded a deal with Producers Recording Co., Inc., in New York, the apparent successors to the Record Syndicate Trust. Davis paid \$6,200 for a number of masters, which included titles by such a diverse group of artists as Judy Canova (4), Carlos Molina (8), Plantation Singers (8), Tommy Tucker (2), W. C. Handy (4), Frankie Trumbauer (17), Southern Wonder Quartet (10), and Johnny McGhee (4). This deal included three sides by the Jubilee Male Quartet, a nondescript name hiding the true identity of the Famous Blue Jay Singers and the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet.

On some of these, Davis had already paid an advance in November 1944. The metalwork was scattered across several sites and some, such as Trumbauer's "Wearing of the Green" / "Irish Washerwoman" came from the Clark Phonograph Co. in Harrison, New Jersey. Davis changed one of the Jubilee Male Quartet titles, C 1723 "Clang-A-Lang," at the last moment. This curiously titled selection—actually a 1932 Paramount recording, via Varsity, of "Clanka A Lanka" by the Famous Blue Jay Singers of Birmingham (Alabama)—was a seminal recording that lent its name to a type of black religious quartet singing style. The Plantation Singers, also from Varsity, were recorded in December 1939. Other titles Davis initially decided to purchase—or at least to audition—were returned, among them ten by the Polish Connecticut Orchestra, two by Johnny Mercer, and two by Phil Harris. Tommy Tucker, Johnny McGhee, W. C. Handy, and two of the Trumbauers found themselves absorbed in anonymity into an album of *Rare Records* (DA 22). Trumbauer, at least, received his own album (DA-29) as did the Southern Wonder Quartet (DA-24), who had signed a contract with Eli Oberstein in June 1940 using a Cleveland, Ohio, address.

Perhaps the recordings of Polish music also helped inspire the next direction in which Davis moved. Certainly one of these had featured an accordion and an excellent, prominent clarinet. On April 17 Davis recorded five titles by The Alpineers—four of them polkas—under the leadership of accordionist Joe Biviano, whose group included clarinetist Andy Sanella. But the next group of recordings, possibly from later that month, properly showed the direction in which Davis now chose to move more decisively.

He recorded eight titles by the orchestra of Alberto Iznaga, including "Cuando Estas A Mi Lado" (the first Hispanic tune he purchased from



Jaime Yamin), which truly launched him in a new direction. The singer was José Luis Monero and the recordings comprised four boleros ("Talvez," "Otra Vez," "Cuando Estas A Mi Lado," and "Mia Sola Seras"), two guarachas ("Pergadito" and "Me Van Mata"), a porro entitled "No Te Queiro" and a pregon, "Tilin-Tilan." Davis recorded sessions from four more Spanish-music groups in 1946 and over the few years this direction provided the key to his survival in the music business.

In August or September he recorded four titles from Cuarteto Hermanos Mercado, two from Vitin Rivera y su Quintette Lupini, and four from Hermanos Mercado's quartet once again. Early October saw him record three more from Mercado, and at the end of that month he recorded boleros from Raul Vidal with the Rafael Seijo Trio. Five more recordings came from Mercado's group, but they might have been the following year. *The Billboard* for October 5, 1946, carried an advertisement for "Cu-Tu-Gu-Ru, a terrific rhumba hit from Puerto Rico from this new music publishing company specializing in Latin-American music." Joe Davis's name featured twice in the advertisement, and he used that as a front page on a piece of sheet music, a bolero-beguine by Yamin, "Confession," with English words by Davis.

While slowly investing in Latin American popular music, Davis quickly jumped into the programming and release of his "4-78" albums. The first ten drew from his own recordings and if the choice of titles was not always obvious, the artists were. In chronological order they were the 5 Red Caps, Bon Bon, Champion Jack Dupree, Una Mae Carlisle, Gabriel Brown, Erskine Butterfield, Deryck Sampson, Spirituals (Galilee Singers and Richard Huey's Jubileers), Walter Thomas, and Coleman Hawkins—the latter having only three discs. Davis then added five sets bought in 1944 from the Record Syndicate Trust: the Three Suns, Sammy Kaye, Harry James, Harry James and Dick Haymes, and Jan Peerce (DA-11 to DA-15). The next six sets mixed purchased sides with sides recorded by Davis. The former comprised Hot Quintette of France (DA-17), Clayton McMichen (DA-19), and McCravy Brothers (DA-20), while he had recorded the Korn Kobblers, Rev. J. C. Burnett, and Singin' Sam—respectively, DA-16, DA-18, and DA-21. He took a full-page advertisement in the May 19, 1946, *Sunday Mirror* plugging the albums by the 5 Red Caps, Bon Bon, the two by Harry James, the Deryck Sampson, and the Three Suns, Sammy Kaye, and Korn Kobblers sets. He set the retail price at \$2.72, "53c for Each Record and 60c for the Album," and the wholesale price at \$1.68.

In April Davis had received a letter from Brenner, Butler and McVeigh, solicitors acting on behalf, presumably, of one of the Irish artists who had

appeared on Davis. The law firm wrote: "Kindly be informed that we have been directed by William Quinn to institute proceedings in connection with some records released by you and bearing his name. We are informed that he did not make the record or records in question and would, therefore, appreciate the opportunity of discussing the problem with your representative before proceeding further."

Their admirable caution was justified for they received a reply that gave the history of the recordings: "The recordings in question were recorded a number of years ago for 'CROWN' records, and were issued and sold under that label bearing the name of William Quinn as artist. Later these recordings were sold to United States Record Corporation, and the records, bearing the name of the artist, were issued and sold by that company. Then, these recordings were sold and issued under the 'DAVIS' label. They are the same recordings above referred to. These recordings were either recorded by your client, or by someone else having the same name. The name 'William Quinn' is not an uncommon one." Davis's letter effectively dismissed the case and perhaps prompted him to re-release Davis 3603 of Quinn's Dublin Orchestra, "Stack o' Barley" backed by "Primrose Vale" and "The Rambler" in album DA-28 "Irish Barn Dances."

Evidence of Davis's continued close, fruitful, friendship with Andy Razaf came when he recorded Betty Thornton at various times during 1946 using Razaf tunes throughout. On June 27 Razaf sent Davis a carbon copy of a letter to Savoy Record Company, 58 Market Street, Newark, New Jersey, granting them permission to record and release a composition jointly written by Una Mae Carlisle and himself. Davis, not surprisingly, owned the publication rights. At the bottom, Razaf had penciled a short message in longhand:

Hi-Boss

Here it is. Going to Highland Falls today until Monday. Will see you then.

Andy

Davis had noted it arrived on the twenty-seventh, the same date as the letter was written.

Early in July the Alpineers returned to record four more polkas, with Sanella's clarinet backed by Frank Banta's piano, along with a sax and steel guitar! But two other July sessions with black female vocalist Betty Thornton fell more in keeping with Davis's plans for albums. She

recorded four tunes, almost all with risqué lyrics—"If I Can't Sell It, I'll Keep Sittin' on It," "Keep Your Nose out of Mama's Business," "Find Out What They Like and How They Like It" (not risqué at all, but sheer matter of fact), and "Naggin' Will Not Hold Your Man," the odd one out. Davis assembled an interesting little combo for the session, but they rarely got room to move, for Betty Thornton's bland, straightforward, and rather un-swinging vocals filled out the sides. The band included trumpeter Bill Dillard, who worked with many name bands of the 1930s, among them those of Jelly Roll Morton, King Oliver, and Luis Russell. By the 1940s he had become a successful singer-actor on stage, including some Broadway shows. *Memphis Bound*, which opened in May 1946, had shut down a couple of weeks before he took this session with Betty Thornton. By December 1946 Dillard appeared in *Beggar's Holiday*, which ran for two years, a career move that might account for Davis using a quite different combo for two more Betty Thornton sessions held in October. Leader of the July group was pianist Billy Bodkins, accompanied by William "Biddy" Fleet (guitar), Al Hall on bass, and Wilmore "Slick" Jones (soon to embark on a long stint in the Gene Sedric band) handling the drums. Davis used three Andy Razaf tunes along with "Find Out What They Like" (music by Fats Waller), and "If I Can't Sell It" with music by Alex Hill.

A week later they returned to record "It's Gonna Be a Long Hard Winter," "Shake Your Can," "Handy Andy," and "The Dentist Song." Despite the studio note by Davis, Slick Jones's drums are not audible. The session proved much less musically worthwhile than the earlier one, on which small measures of Bill Dillard and Biddy Fleet greatly improved the quality. Undeterred, Davis released DA-31 subtitled as "Nice Songs for Naughty People sung in a lady-like fashion." The cover features a photograph of her sitting at a piano, head turned toward the listener, and winking one eye; providing you an idea what you would be buying. Unbeknown to Davis, his dalliance with albums of risqué material eventually caused him massive legal battles and financial losses in the future with Betty Thornton, unfortunately, leading the way.

Thornton seems to have made only two recordings other than those for Davis; one with a trio on Chicago 115 (in its "Harlem Series") and the other with her Dixielanders on another Mayo Williams label, Harlem 1003. Oddly, Williams later leased this record to Ivin Ballen's 20th Century label in Philadelphia, which released it as by Muriel (Bea Booze) Nichols. These sides probably predate the Davis sessions and are of even less musical

interest than her initial batches of recordings in July for Davis. From the outset Davis planned to issue an album from the recordings made at these two July sessions, for his original sheet from each session has “DA-31 Album” clearly marked beneath the artist’s name. This notation demonstrates how quickly he programmed his albums, with DA-30 being “Polkas” by the Alpineers.

The deal between Davis and Gennett Records in Richmond, Indiana, collapsed and ended on June 30, 1946. The aftermath—fraught with copious legal correspondence—took many months to sort out. The contract had been quite straightforward: Gennett (properly “The Starr Piano Company”) sold masters to Davis, which could be re-bought at cost, and Davis paid Starr for pressing discs. Complicating matters was the loan from Davis to Starr.

Davis spent much time during 1945 in Richmond, Indiana, as correspondence with Cow Cow Davenport indirectly showed, but what finally brought about the collapse of the deal is not known. The outcome of the case, *Joe Davis v. Starr*, over which Judge Harry N. Routzohn, of Dayton, Ohio, presided, was spelled out clearly in the following letter dated July 22, 1945, to the judge from F. E. Schortemeier. Starr’s solicitor showed the terms of which he would be willing to make a settlement:

With the distinct and definite understanding and agreement that Mr. Davis will pay the balance in full not later than Friday, July 26, 1946, we are willing to agree to all of Mr. Davis’ terms, as follows:

1. We will allow credit on the balance due on the notes which is in the sum of \$3,136.38, as per enclosed statement.
2. We will allow 2% discount beginning in August, 1945 to date which is in the sum of \$2,719.30 as per enclosed statement.
3. We will return all plates.
4. We will return all Mothers free of cost and any Sub-Masters or extra plates belonging to records pressed for Davis.
5. Each party will release and discharge the other party from any further liability on the agreement and all amendments and extensions thereto, and all other liability of any nature whatever to date.

This agreement is effective only if the payment of the balance is made by Friday, July 26. Davis owes Starr according to statement \$24,420.00, from which we subtract \$3,136.38 on the notes and \$2,719.30 on the 2%, total \$5,855.68 subtractions, leaving a net balance which Davis owes Starr of \$18,564.32.

The letter gave Davis only a few days to respond, but by August 2 Schortemeier had written Harry Gennett at Starr reporting that he had had a "telegram from Mr. Davis asking that you turn over all plates to him immediately. I understand from what you told me that you have already started returning his plates. Please let me know whether this has been completed." This letter makes certain that a slow response by his customer will not ruin the deal he has managed to agree for him. Davis, to be sure, could not have relished the prospect of finding nearly \$20,000.00 with a few days' notice.

Davis kept a keen eye on Starr's activities after all this had subsided. On October 18, 1946, he wrote to Charles Davis in Richmond with a view to buying the Gennett plant from Clarence Gennett. After nothing came of the offer, he continued to manufacture records at MGM's pressing plant. Davis's effects include a clipping from April 1952 with the heading, Gennett Family Sells Controlling Interest in the Starr Piano Company, pointing out that two companies, most notably Decca Records, held major leases on part of the buildings in the thirty-acre lot owned by Starr.

On July 19 Davis contracted with pianist Lawrence "88" Keyes to make sixteen or more sides, with a view to completing a boogie piano album. He already had produced 4-78 albums by Erskine Butterfield (DA-6) and Deryck Sampson (DA-7). On August 6 Keyes wrote to Davis: "I am now willing to make your Boogie Woogie Album. I made a sign 30 by 40 with the name Lawrence '88' Keyes trio for the window display at the Broadway Music Bar 94 Street on Broadway, on it is Davis Record Artists. Please give me a chance to use my guitar and my base player. I am sure they will give the records more punches, and I will pay my men the union scale my-self." No trace of this session exists nor any reason for it having been canceled. Just possibly Keyes was already under contract for he also had a release on the Chicago label.

Nonetheless, Davis kept an eye on Keyes's career, retaining a clipping from the *New York Amsterdam News* of November 9, 1946, with a photograph of Keyes's group under the caption, "Trio Is Club Downbeat's Headliner." The group was at the Downbeat Club "for the next two weeks. They move to Bill Frederick's Three Deuces Cafe in Newark, Nov. 18, where they will broadcast twice a week. The boys are Keyes, piano; Josh Foster, guitar, and Al McClean, bass." Presumably this is the group so nearly recorded for Davis, but by then Davis found a new rhythm section and used it to back Betty Thornton.

Before then he had recorded yet another female singer, this time a white vocalist, Millicent Scott, at the Empire Studio on September 25. Scott was backed by the Park Lane Trio, as was Bon Bon, and the choice of material suggests the hand of Davis. One title, "Never Judge a Book by Its Cover," written by Irene Higginbotham, was pleasant enough but the records lack real bite and quality. The trio had also changed since the last Bon Bon session; Andy Sanella remained the guitarist and he was joined by pianist Cy Einhorn. Davis never did find out who played bass—or at least he never bothered to write in the name. Quite possibly that lack of attention to detail contributed to the unexciting product, which was issued as Davis 2112 (a new series) and on a flexible (though thick) red plastic. Perhaps these were custom pressings of some sort as at the bottom of the session notes made by Davis he had written, ("not for MGM"). When he offered to sell or lease many sides to MGM two years later, this disc was conspicuously absent.

About this time Davis took organist Henry Murtaugh in to record eight titles, which were issued as an album of Organ Solos (DA-33). DA-32 had been one of "Musicclassics" from assorted items bought earlier in the year, with titles like "Tales from the Vienna Woods," "Skaters' Waltz," and "Valse Caprice." There was no music publishing royalty on Johann Strauss, which certainly pleased the always fiscally aware Mr. Davis.

The titles for the next two 4-78 albums were recorded in October, on three consecutive days starting with an October 15 Betty Thornton session that put down four more titles at an afternoon session, with half an hour to spare. The titles were all by Andy Razaf: "Mama's Well Has Done Gone Dry," "Never Brag about Your Man," "Vice Versa," and "My Man o' War," the last-named cowritten by Spencer Williams. Possibly on the strength of his earlier involvement in the Park Lane Trio in March—but also because Davis intended him as a replacement for Lawrence Keyes for his piano album—the pianist (and leader) was Frank Signorelli. Bill Dillard was unavailable, probably due to his stage work, so Signorelli brought in his old trumpet buddy from the Original Memphis 5 days, Phil Napoleon (born Filippo Napoli), who worked for years as a staff musician at NBC. Drummer Chauncey Morehouse—another veteran of the 1920s and many sessions—recorded with Signorelli behind Bix and Tram in 1927. Clarinetist Hank D'Amico performed very well on the second Wingy Manone session for Davis in 1945 and got the call for this gig. Had Signorelli used Jimmy Lytell, who'd been on the Savannah Churchill sides of 1942, some 60

percent of the OM5 would have regrouped. Bass player Felix Giobbe was a late addition, actually written in on Davis's session notes in a different color. He had worked with many name bands, as well as with Morehouse in 1938.

It sounds like a friendly session, for on "Mama's Well Has Done Gone Dry," Betty sings, "Phil Napoleon Brown, who's been runnin' round." Davis last recorded this risqué title in 1928 with Martha Copeland, Bubber Miley, and J. C. Johnson for Columbia. Davis now had four titles toward Betty Thornton's second album and ordered 5,000 sets of labels for the first album, the day after he'd recorded the eighth title. Early in November he was to order 10,000 sets of Betty Thornton's second album, DA-35, entitled "Songs They Didn't Sing in School," with a photograph of a most attractive Betty Thornton reclining on a rug.

On the afternoon of the Betty Thornton session, Davis recorded a group that pointed a new direction for him in the early to mid-1950s, although at the time he could not have appreciated the fact. He had signed a contract on September 9 with a group called the Manhattan Mellotones, although in the studios at Empire they were marked down as The Bell Boys. Four titles were planned from this four-man vocal group, comprising Hobson Broadway, John Henry Brown, David Wallace, and William Willis, with guitarist Charles B. Richards. Only one tune, written by Broadway, seems to have been attempted and "It's Too Late Now" turned out to be prophetic. Davis eventually crossed it out on his recording sheet and re-allocated the matrix number for the following day.

This rather unproductive session presumably replaced the session that Davis intended to record by Lawrence Keyes. Perhaps he felt the need for an album of slightly more sophisticated piano playing, although he still had the Erskine Butterfield set in catalogue. In just short of the three hours allowed, Frank Signorelli recorded four self-penned titles, the only up-tempo item being "Goin' Nowhere Fast." Signorelli returned to the studio at 10:00 the following morning to put down the other four titles, two of which, "Bonnie's Boogie" and "Eighty-Eight Keys to Brooklyn," fit the boogie pattern. The latter was hardly an appropriate title if the session had originally been intended for Lawrence "88" Keyes! Maybe Signorelli enjoyed a little joke, for one of the other titles was "Moonrise on the Caribbean" (a reference to Davis's Spanish music catalogue). This long day continued for Signorelli with a 2:00 P.M. start on the other Betty Thornton session. Davis apparently so liked the group backing her that he decided to record a further session just with the jazz band.



With the exception of Neil Marshall (drums) and New Orleans-born, Italian-bred clarinet-playing Sal Franzella, the band backing Betty Thornton remained the same as two days previously. The inventive playing of Franzella probably inspired Davis to record the band on a jazz set. Franzella recorded earlier that year with Napoleon for Swan Records, which doubtless helped the smooth running of the session. All four planned titles were successfully recorded, and in general the session was less stiff and, by the last title, Betty Thornton even manages to generate a slight degree of swing. Alternative takes of "I'm a Stationary Woman Looking for a Permanent Man" are as good, if not better, than the issued take. The other titles date back far into Davis's music publishing past. He had recorded "Meat Man Pete" with Monette Moore for Ajax in 1924 and the other two titles, "If You Can't Control Your Man" and "You Can't Have It Unless I Give It to You" were recorded in the 1920s by Lizzie Miles and Rosa Henderson respectively. Album DA-35 was now completed.

Fortunately the Betty Thornton session finished early, at 4:30 P.M., and the band immediately began to record, without a break, as Cheech and His Jazz Band. Davis later crossed this through and called it the Frank Signorelli Quintet, probably because the pianist tolerated his nickname in private but was none too happy about seeing it on a record label. The first title attempted, a lively version of J. Russel Robinson's O.D.J.B. hit, "Margie," carried a notation by Davis that the publisher was Mills. Perhaps inspired by the success of Will Bradley's "Jingle Bell Boogie," the next title was a version of "Jingle Bells," elaborated to "Jingling the Bells." "Sorrento in the Evening" is none too distant from "Come Back to Sorrento," even though Davis takes the credit; perhaps the large Italian contingent was responsible for this choice.

The session ended with one of Davis's best jazz tunes, which he wrote with Don Redman and Paul Denniker. Davis was finally happy with the fourth take of "Save It, Pretty Mama," but the tune's development through the earlier takes is instructive as to the dynamics of a successful session. Cheech and his band and Davis must have been well pleased; they were quickly slotted into the black-labeled 9000 series, to follow the initial release of "The Sheik of Araby" / "Come and Get It" by Harry James on Davis 9000. The four Signorelli titles on 9001 and 9002, in fact, completed this series of releases.

Davis couldn't know at the time that these October sessions marked the end of his Davis album series. DA-36 was planned; a third set of four discs by Harry James was to follow up DA-13 and DA-14. "Harry James—Gems



By James" was also to include many Dick Haymes titles (as had DA-14) and Davis actually ordered up 10,000 sets of labels on December 31, 1946, and organized the artwork. But his plans never came to fruition. No pressings turned up, although a Varsity test pressing of "Heading for Hallelujah," one of the programmed titles for the album set, turned up among Davis's effects. The completed artwork for Harry James DA-36 exists among the album covers Davis turned into wood-mounted wall plaques. This album series, then, failed to survive 1946, although stocks of these albums remained for sale. Davis's main hope now lay with his Spanish recordings and, as a pointer to the future, "Caribbean Music" was elected to ASCAP on September 25, 1946.

### Barely Hanging On

Apart from his Hispanic popular music sessions, the hectic round of recordings that intensified in August 1943 came to an end. Davis orchestrated only one recording session in 1947, Bop Jackson's Dukes of Rhythm, and that held only minimal interest. Their three-hour session at Empire on May 15 eventually turned in only two titles, although Davis copyrighted a third ("Let's Get High Jack") at the Library of Congress on May 3, 1947. Davis accounted for these titles on a new 400 matrix series—409 ("What'll You Have") and 410 ("Dust Pan")—and their labels describe them as "Orchestra Novelty with Singing," which is fair. They attempted jivey Harlem jump numbers, and the second title gets close, but its not overly talented four-man front line helps little. Two tenor saxes and trumpet supported the leader's alto sax, while the songs are credited to Gildo Mahones and "Sir John" Godfrey, respectively pianist and drummer according to Davis's notes.

These young men—Godfrey (20) and Mahones (18)—lived in the city; Godfrey on West 128th and Mahones in the Bronx. Godfrey later made a name for himself, working with many R 'n' B bands in the 1950s (most notably with Joe Morris) as well as some jazz artists such as Freddie Redd (vibes) and Paul Chambers (bass). Mahones crafted a career in jazz, playing with many famous musicians, including a long gig backing the vocal trio of Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross.

Their Davis record, which smacks of being a custom pressing, was issued as Davis 711 (lucky numbers and the only release in that series) and on red plastic like the Millicent Scott. Davis ordered labels to be printed on

the following day. Four years later, Sir John (minus surname) occupied the drummer's chair in Joe Morris's band at Atlanta's Municipal Auditorium, where they "dished out some of the hottest and most rhythmic blues and stomp music heard here since the late Bennie Moten band," as the correspondent of the Baltimore *Afro-American* wrote in December 1951.

By the end of 1947, Davis advertised his entire catalogue of masters for sale. But before he actually moved to sell his catalogue, Davis replied to an offer from the Pyramid International Corp. of Madison Avenue to lease certain sides: "I hereby grant to you the right to use and press selections entitled 'SHAKE THE BLUES AWAY,' 'BREAD A'N GRAVY,' 'FLYING HAWK,' and 'DRIFTING ON A REED,' free of publishers copyright royalties for the six months period beginning April 1st, 1947 and ending Sept. 30th, 1947." The deal focused on records for sale in Europe only.

Why Pyramid chose one Wingy Manone and one Coleman Hawkins is difficult to understand and, unless they were somehow pressed using Davis's own labels, such Pyramid issues remain unknown to discographers. Is it possible that they were aimed at U.S. military personnel in Europe? Perhaps this company, using an "accommodation address," acted on behalf of a European record company? As the agreement allowed Pyramid to avoid music publishing payments, it looked a cut-price deal by them anyway.

By March 1947 Davis fully appreciated the impact of the recession in the record business that began in the summer of 1946. Even his attractively packaged four-78 album sets, often with hitherto unreleased material, were not selling. Opting to get out of the record business as a manufacturer, and to concentrate once more on his core music publishing, Davis took a full-page advertisement on page 17 of the March 22, 1947, *The Billboard*, headed:

AN OPEN LETTER TO RECORD MANUFACTURERS  
from JOE DAVIS

and underneath gave his reason for sale:

In View of the Fact That I Intend To Continue Most of My Efforts to My New Latin-American Music Publishing Enterprise CARIBBEAN MUSIC, INC. I Am Offering for sale AS ONE UNIT All The Masters Listed Below: (Subject to Future Royalties of Copyright Owners, A.F. of M. and Artists)

There followed a most impressive listing of the material he had released (and mostly recorded) since the summer of 1943. A major company could have been proud of this as a catalogue base; for a small independent, it was a telling performance. Counting the sides he purchased, Davis assembled a catalogue unmatched by any other independent record company. At the end of the notice he simply added, “also 150 foreign masters of classical selections,” which cost him anywhere from \$20.00 to \$50.00 each; slightly more for the twelve-inch discs.

Unfortunately for Davis the record world suffered from the same problems that he faced. Most independents were in a far worse state than he was, having no music publishing raft to keep them buoyant. No one beat a path to the door of 331 West 51st Street to buy the masters Davis offered. Over the next year, spurred by the second AFM recording ban, MGM (the company that pressed his records after the Gennett deal collapsed) showed an interest in buying sides.

Unable to sell his catalogue Davis simply put his masters into storage, for which we should be eternally grateful, as his original sixteen-inch transcription discs survived in so many cases, complete with alternative takes and unreleased material. Today we appreciate the extra insights we receive in listening to variations by great artists in their field, thinking out the courses of their solos, and thereby understanding that a released recording results from an outgrowth of considerable thought, effort, and creative activity. Thus we can hear the likes of Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, and Champion Jack Dupree work their way through their material in a manner rarely achieved elsewhere at these peaks in their creative careers.

As Davis’s announcement so succinctly stated, he began concentrating on his Latin American sides. Once more he jumped ahead of the field, which faced both another AFM recording ban on top of another year of drought in sales—problems that left Davis largely unrattled and plunging ahead. In typical fashion, he fully invested in the Latin American project, having at no time in the previous thirty years in the business shown the slightest inclination toward this music.

Also typically, Davis ran his music publishing for Hispanic music as well as he had for the American vernacular music. He produced a number of successful hits, like “Jack, Jack, Jack” and, the biggest of all, “Quizas, Quizas, Quizas.” This hit song surfaced everywhere; it was “Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps” in English, “Qui Sait, Qui Sait, Qui Sait” when published in France by Societe D’Editions Musicales Internationales, while German publisher West Ton Verlag, G.M.B.H. Bonn titled it “Wer Weiss, Wer

Weiss, Wer Weiss." Osvaldo Farres Vazquez's enticing song was covered by literally dozens of artists. In England for instance, one could buy it by Eric Winstone's Orchestra on MGM, by Monte Rey on Columbia, or by Jean Cavell (H.M.V.). Both Wilhelme la sua orchestra tipica (Durium) and Aldo Donk (Cetra) recorded it in Italian. French record purchasers could choose among versions by Los Camagueyanos on Decca, Luis Mariano on H.M.V., Main Romans on Pathe, by Rico's Creole Band on H.M.V., Ramon Mendizabal on Odeon, Jan Muzurus and Eddie Warner on Odeon, Henri Leca on Polydor, Felix Valvert on Pacific, Roberto Sylva on Selmer, and Les Soeurs Etienne on Decca.

These issues don't even consider the Latin American releases or those in the United States. Ethel Smith (Decca 24272) enjoyed such enormous success with it that Bing Crosby covered it, too, on Decca 27536. Dave Kapp sent a cable that read: "BING MADE THRILLING RECORD OF 'QUIZAS' . . . I THINK HIS RECORD CAN PUT THE SONG OVER." Bob Eberle also covered it, which Decca released in France. Ethel Smith's version was leased everywhere, including on Italian Decca with the Banda Carioca, as was Crosby's. Argentinian Victor released versions by Hector y su Gran Orqu de Jazz and Rene Cospito y su ritmo. Rita Hayworth even featured "Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps" in Columbia Pictures' *The Hayworth Story*.

As late as 1975 Davis continued receiving significant writer royalties on the song (he wrote the English words to it), as a check from the Netherlands for \$84.60 shows. This payment, not from a location for heavy sales at any time for a Latin American song, let alone twenty-eight years after it was published, speaks legions about the importance of holding a copyright. Señor Vazquez surely expressed delight with his \$500.00 advance in 1947, to say nothing of the 50 percent royalty received. "Quizas, Quizas, Quizas" proved that throughout Davis's recording adventures, his music publishing publicity business continued at full stretch and provided him with some measure of financial stability.

Other matters came and went throughout 1947 but Davis now centered his attention upon music publishing, although naturally not all of that was involved with Latin American music. In July, Harry Gerson of Sinatra Songs, Inc., wrote to confirm that "the new quotation to Republic Pictures is five hundred dollars, which they will accept." As the payment specified "Caribbean Music," it is likely related to the success of "Quizas, Quizas, Quizas." Spencer Williams—in hopes of placing them—wrote in August from Sunbury-on-Thames in England to say that he had sent some records with his new songs on them: "How about 'Hello My Darlin' if you like it

and care to help me out with \$150. advance fore the American Rights I will sign the contract at once." The next paragraph offers a fascinating insight into postwar, rationed England: "You see I'm trying to get home as things are very grim here and I want to come home. So anything you do for me will be highly appreciated. But you must hurry, because after the 1st of October I can't take out much money and me and my family need all we can get out as we are bringing all our furniture over. please do what you can. thanks. But do it at once."

September brought an unusual bonus following the release of the second Betty Thornton album. Enterprise Records in Hollywood wrote asking for a Copyright License Agreement as vocalist Edith Wilson recorded Andy Razaf's "If You Can't Control Your Man," which Betty Thornton had recorded with Frank Signorelli's band. As proof of their good name, they even referred Davis to Dun & Bradstreet, where they earned a D + 2 rating! Perhaps this set a small West Coast trend, as a couple of years later, Dootsie Williams's Blue Records label released "Find Out What They Like" and "I'll Keep Sittin' on It" (both by Razaf and both recorded in 1946 by Betty Thornton), as sung by Hattie Noel.

In October 1946 Davis once more changed trademarks, this time altering Caribbean Music, Inc., to Caribbean Music Co. The transfer comprised some 350 titles in all, virtually all of them in Spanish and virtually all of them added in only six months. An undated interview with Davis appears to be from this period; one line reads: "Currently Joe has . . . a rumba called 'Perhaps Perhaps Perhaps,' an import from South America." Entitled ADVENTURES IN AMERICAN MARKETING, the interviewer, one William F. Siegel, extracts some very pertinent points about the marketing of records. He sets the scene in the Brill Building where, "in the midst of all this confusion, are located the offices of Joe Davis." He went on to write: "Joe Davis, as I have seen him in various hotels, always gives the impression of dignity. He looks more like a banker or a college professor than a music publisher. When I arrived for my interview on the marketing practices of the music business, I was unprepared to see him in his office, with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, working harder than anyone else in the place."

Siegel then asked a question "in line with product determination": "How do you decide on a tune—by trends (what the public has been buying), or your feel, or by statistics of record sales, past sheet music sales, and current sales?" Davis's answer to this was, "I more or less go by my own judgement," which can have been of little assistance to the interviewer trying to find slots for the answers. However, his next question struck gold for

him. "How do you get distribution on your music, sell direct to the dealers or through jobbers?" Thankfully, Davis answered in great detail: "We sell direct to the music jobbers (such as Lyon and Healy in Chicago) and the syndicate stores (Kresge, some of the other 5 and 10 cent stores that have music departments, and a few of the department stores). There are about 20 music jobbers that, in turn, sell to over 5000 dealers. By selling to the jobbers we save a lot of accounting expense as they service all their own accounts."

Asked by Siegel for a breakdown to the 35 cents per copy retail cost of sheet music, Davis gave:

Sold to jobber for	22 cents a copy
Printing costs	2 cents a copy
Royalty to writers	3 cents a copy
Other costs—depend on exploitation and how the song sells.	

In the case of a hit, Siegel inquired if Davis would ever print "on the coast" by sending out plates to save transportation costs? He replied in the negative: "as it only amounts to a few cents more per package to the coast (not as much as a penny a copy), besides the jobber pays the postage and in turn charges the dealer for it."

On the question of promotion and whether he stressed his name or the tune being worked on at that time, Davis responded:

We work on the individual tune . . . take out full page ads in some of the trade papers—"Billboard" and "Variety"—send out vinylite disks to the jockeys (cost 30 cents to make 25 cents to mail). We put on five extra men to get coverage over the entire country. After we start getting the plugs, we write the jobbers and tell them to put the tune on their plug list. We let them know that we are going to work on it . . . they put it on their lists, and pretty soon we start getting calls. . . . On *IN MY DREAMS*, I spent from 20 to \$25,000 on exploitation and promotion. Only sold 5,000 copies . . . the tune was a flop! There's a saying in the trade that a tune is a flop when it costs a dollar a copy—*IN MY DREAMS* cost almost five dollars a copy. (An interesting side-light to this is that here was a tune that had hit records—by such bands as Vaughn Monroe—plenty of plugs on the air by top bands and vocalists. Several transcriptions were released, but, although it was well known . . . *IT DIDN'T SELL COPIES*.)

Asked if he worked on special discounts, Davis replied: "We sell on 2 per cent—30 days, but we also must accept returns on unsold copies from the jobbers after 90 days."

Siegel's final question was as intriguing as Davis's answer and almost certainly suggested by someone in the business:

SIEGEL: Do you have any ideas on how the publisher, or the whole publishing industry, can get away from this dependence on the performer?

DAVIS: The practices established in the business [were] the fault of the profession. If all publishers would stop this eternal patronizing of the performers, catering to them, doing almost anything to get their tunes on; if they would stop this for six months, the entire pattern of the business would change and the band leaders and vocalists would come to the publisher for music. The present system is kept alive by competition in the trade, and competition in the trade is what started the system in the first place.

The AFM recording ban of 1942–1943 failed fully to settle the underlying issues. Concern remained among members of Congress over excesses of trade union functions and the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 severely regulated these functions. This act made illegal the AFM's collection of its 1 percent royalty payment. James Petrillo, still president of the AFM, sent a circular to all record company owners stating that their contracts with the AFM would terminate as of December 31, 1947, and would not be renewed because "on and after January 1, 1948 the members of the American Federation of Musicians will no longer perform the services provided for in said contract. This notice carries with it our declared intention, permanently and completely, to abandon that type of employment."

Reassuringly, it was signed "very truly yours," which probably gave few record manufacturers joy. As for Joe Davis specifically, it provided further evidence that he made the correct move and left, for all significant purposes, the manufacture of records. Of course, as in 1942, any recordings made prior to January 1, 1948, could still be issued anyway, and at least Taft-Hartley had saved him 1 percent of the retail price. The 1948 ban was not as severely restrictive and record manufacturers found a number of ways of getting around the problems—and by no means the least obvious was to simply ignore it. AFM officials tried substituting a "tax" on jukeboxes placed in public places, which inspired the 1948 convention

of jukebox operators in Chicago soon to organize the Music Operators of America. Three times over the next two years, the so-called Scott-Fellows Juke-Box Bill met defeat in Congress, led by the efforts of the MOA lobby. Despite the lack of success of the second AFM ban, which ended in December 1948, Petrillo remained the organization's president until 1958, stepping down just before the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959 further tightened trade union belts.

The November 10 *New York Enquirer*, under the heading, Records Joe Davis' Song, mentioned that "Beryl Davis . . . young and beautiful vocalist from England, is creating quite a stir here as a song stylist via her weekly WJZ programs. A new record label called 'London' will feature as its first release 'No One Else Will Do,' an unusual foxtrot ballad, which was recorded by Miss Davis and was written by Joe Davis." Davis really was her name—her father, Harry Davis, led the Oscar Rabin band in which Beryl had sung since 1938—so perhaps this added appeal to the music publisher. Her American press agency, Willard Alexander, called her "tall, blue-eyed and well proportioned" but perhaps it was her backing group on London (Stephane Grappelly & His Quintet, featuring pianist George Shearing) that held great appeal to Joe Davis.

Litigation over music publishing rights and "due royalty" payments was nothing new in the business but late in 1947 an unusual case came before the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of Illinois as a civil action. It involved Davis, dating back to his dealings in the mid-1930s with Eli Oberstein, then A&R man with RCA, and was brought against RCA Victor Corporation, Lester Melrose, and Eli Oberstein by Walter Davis (one of Bluebird's most prolifically recorded blues artists). Not only were there two Davis's involved—the plaintiff and the indirectly involved Joe Davis—but one of Walter Davis's solicitors was John A. Davis. The plaintiff sued for allegedly unpaid royalties, which, according to the Complaint, "exceeds, exclusive of interest and costs, the sum of Three Thousand Dollars." However, the final clause of the claim asked for \$50,000 "as liquidated damages."

According to the case brought by Walter Davis, Eli Oberstein "arranged for the recording dates" on the early sessions and "arranged for the sale of copyrights to musical selections composed by the plaintiff." By January 1937 Lester Melrose took over this function. The Complaint requested that "RCA set forth an account of all . . . money received by them . . . in respect of the said profits, royalties, commissions or gains from sales of the musical selections." RCA understandably expressed great concern



and H. S. Moncrief, from their Copyright Department, immediately wrote to Joe Davis asking for clarification:

Further to our telephone conversation yesterday with reference to the suit instigated against us by Walter Davis, the colored blues singer, we are interested mainly in knowing what contracts you have in your files covering the selections which we are paying royalty on to your Company. If the suit progresses far enough we may have to ask for photostated copies to present but at the present time will you give me by letter the information as to what you have, are they on a royalty basis and if so were royalties actually paid.

The selections involved are:	Sales
MOONLIGHT IS MY SPREAD	5416
SLOPPY DRUNK AGAIN	1692
TRAVELIN' THIS LONESOME ROAD	4048
SAD AND LONESOME BLUES	4048
MINUTE MAN PT. 1	442
MINUTE MAN PT. 2	442
SWEET SIXTEEN	725
WONDER WHERE MY BABY'S GONE	1692
ROOT MAN BLUES	6214
PEARLY MAY	4744
WHAT HAVE I DONE WRONG	4744
I CAN TELL BY THE WAY YOU SMELL	3131
SANTA CLAUS	3425
FEEL MYSELF SINKIN' DOWN	N. L.
JUST WONDERING	6854
FALLIN' RAIN	6854
WELL DIGGIN' PAPA	2049
CARPENTER	2049
DON'T THE CLOUDS LOOK LONESOME	717
KATY BLUES	1544
ASHES IN MY WHISKEY	1544
BLUES AT MIDNIGHT	1310
CAN'T GET ALONG WITH YOU	1310

Besides showing the immediate urgency that this suit had been received at RCA, it also offered a unique insight into sales of one of Bluebird's

best-selling blues artists; at least, one must assume best-selling, in view of the numerous sessions involved. Between June 1930 and December 1941 Davis recorded twenty sessions; the first four for Victor, although almost half the titles were reissued later on Bluebird. He recorded just over one hundred and fifty titles and the selections quoted above are from just four sessions from 1935 and 1936. "Feel Myself Sinkin' Down" was shown as "not listed" for the good reason that it had never been issued. All the others appeared on Bluebird, although a few were reissued either on Bluebird and/or Montgomery Ward. These selections mark the halfway point in Walter Davis's prewar recording career, and nine sessions followed. Even then, with more than a decade of sales, *none* had sold above 6,854 copies, even though the Bluebird issue also appeared on Montgomery Ward. Three of the discs did not sell even close to 1,000 and the two-part "Minute Man" failed to sell 500 copies. Whatever the situation, no one was making a fortune. RCA requested a reply from Davis at his "earliest convenience."

Davis immediately wrote to Eli Oberstein, addressing his letter to him at RCA, where he now worked as an A&R director. Having explained the situation he wrote: "In view of the fact that Victor paid the old Georgia Music Company the royalties covering these selections, they are looking to Georgia for proof of ownership. These were numbers that you turned over to me, and when you did, you informed me that you had releases from Walter Davis, and if they were ever needed, you would let me have them, so I will appreciate it if you will let me hear from you immediately regarding same."

Meanwhile, RCA's Law Department had written to Georgia Music regarding the petition. W. A. Osterling replied to Joe Davis: "As you can see from the complaint, the charge is made in general that this company was not authorized or licensed to use the selections composed by Walter Davis in recordings of this artist made by this company from time to time since 1930. As your files will show, you licensed us to use some of these selections. Although we hope that the entire action may be disposed of by settlement between the plaintiff and Melrose (our licensor for all selections recorded since 1939), we want you to know that we are relying on your licenses to us insofar as we may be required to account for the use of the selections covered by said licenses."

RCA was firmly bouncing the ball back into Joe Davis's court and distancing itself from the litigation. Considering, however, that Lester Melrose did not become their licensor until 1939 (according to Osterling, although the petition stated 1937), it seems exceedingly unfortunate—and

unrealistic—for Davis that RCA should expect him to settle with the plaintiff for dealings made in 1935 and 1936.

Davis files lack further correspondence, but the suit was amicably resolved because Walter Davis continued to record for RCA Victor. He had already recorded for them in 1946 and February 1947, and his final recording session for Victor occurred in 1952. Davis's title to the music publishing on some mid-1930s blues recorded for Bluebird also recurred in 1965 when RCA issued LPV-518 *Bluebird Blues* (as part of its "Vintage Series"). This long-play album included Tampa Red's "Mean Mistreater Blues" from 1934 and "Wild Cow Blues" and "Somebody's Been Borrowing That Stuff" (1935) by Big Joe Williams and on July 2, 1965, they wrote to Davis acknowledging his ownership of the music publishing and, subsequently, paid him accordingly.

The year ended quietly for Davis. Some of his albums actually sold very well (Jan Peerce's DA-16 sold a total of 11,848 units) and he was certainly not against the occasional subsequent album release and even the odd single-78 release. *The Billboard* for October 18 carried advance publicity of Beacon 5021 (*sic*) by Gabriel Brown and a review of JD 5021 (*sic*) on November 8. One week later the Spanish-language weekly in New York City, *Variedades*, carried a half-page advertisement plugging his latest hit: Disco Davis 621 "Rock and Rye." He continued promoting his Latin American titles and over the next few years leased material for release on Columbia (often in Mexico), MGM, Verne, Seeco, Victor, Sonora, Margo, Ideal, and Coda among other ethnic labels and series.

At this time Davis also toyed with the notion of publishing a small book, *Latin-American Rhythms* by Gabriel Escobar-Casas. Davis once thought of publishing his own book about the growth of jazz and swing in truncated form, but laced with plenty of notated examples of rhythmic differences. Escobar-Casas wrote that the book was aimed at all who wish to study Latin American folklore, whether they are professional or not. His personal experience as a musician in Latin American orchestras, then as a leader, and as an arranger on American as well as Central and South American radio stations, inspired him to write *Latin-American Rhythms*. It's a simple but instructive document, using one page per style, linking each to specific countries, so that "Argentina" discusses tango, chacarera, ranchera, and zamba. "The Master Key of All Latin American Rhythms" covers the afro, bamba, bailecito, bambuco, bolero, Brazilian march, corrido, chacarera, cueca, conga, danza, danzon, guabina, guajira, guaracha, huapango, huayno, marinera, mereengue, pasillo, plena, porro, samba,

son Cubano, son chapin or son Guatemalteco, son huasteco, seis chereao, rumba, tango, tamborito, jarabe, joropo, and Argentina zamba. The ability to play this range of rhythms marks you as a useful addition to any Latin band.

## Chapter Eight

# Back to the Brill Building

The year 1948 marked Joe Davis's effective departure as a full-time record executive. He sold his West 51st Street building and moved back into the Brill Building at 1619 Broadway, the city's longtime "home" for songwriters and publishers. Nonetheless, Davis occasionally ventured back into producing discs. *The Billboard* for February 21, 1948, carried this caption: Davis To Issue Celebrity Label. Beneath the caption it reported:

Joe Davis, veteran music publisher and disker, has re-entered the pop platter field and will market pressings of his biscuit backlog, amassed thru a long career in the wax biz, under a new label called Celebrity. First releases of the diskery, Savannah Churchill's "Fat Meat Is Good Meat" backed by "Tell Me Your Blues And I Will Tell You Mine," are skedded for the retail market March 1. Diskery has named Larry Newton as sales manager and is trying to line-up national distribution.

According to Davis, the label will have no effect upon his Davis label, which will continue its separate operation for the most part in the Latin-American field.

This disc cross-coupled the 1942 Beacon session, released to cash in on her Manor hit. Anxious to obtain as much mileage as possible from his advertisement in *The Billboard* for "Fat Meat Is Good Meat" (Celebrity 2003) Davis included a copy of the record label, presumably to highlight some of the musicians present. Beneath this the ad stated that the wholesale price was 49 cents and the dealer price 75 cents, "all orders sent post paid without extra cost." Below this, in capital letters, he wrote:

LIVE WIRE GOOD-PAYING DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

Many record producers must have smiled at that plea.

Davis printed a small Celebrity Records release sheet, No. 1 (seemingly the only one), offering availability of three records on March 19: the plugged release along with a picture of Celebrity 2007 by Sammy Kaye and his Orchestra with Tommy Ryan as vocalist. He proclaimed this coupling as, “Two ‘Oldies’ with the ‘New Look,’” and as part of the Popular-Standard series. Jan Peerce’s album sold over 11,000 copies and Davis issued Celebrity 2006 “Without a Song” and “I’m Falling in Love with Someone,” neither of which appeared on his album. Celebrity 2003 was the Savannah Churchill with the full personnel named after the caption *Savannah at Her Best—Musicians That Sizzle*. The release sheet included a double column listing of artists under the headings:

*Celebrity Records*  
*Promises Releases of Distinction—*  
*Songs of Appeal for Every Taste—*  
*A Roster of Celebrated Artists—*

Davis was clearly offering many potential releases, should the demand exist. Some Bon Bon reissues followed, but some were new releases of previously unissued material from earlier sessions. On February 26 Davis ordered 3,000 pairs of labels for Celebrity 2012 by Champion Jack Dupree; the remaining two titles, “Big Legged Mama” and “I’m a Doctor for Women,” from his last session. Celebrity 2012 remains virtually unknown to postwar blues collectors, though a handful of copies turned up in Davis’s effects.

Interestingly, *The Billboard* account above mentions Davis’s reentry into the record scene, implying his retirement from the business. Davis eventually left a long and twisted trail of seemingly haphazard releases. For example, he reissued the 5 Red Caps’ JD 7142, “Strictly on the Safety Side” and “Words Can’t Explain,” which may date from this period, as Beacon 4120 (the only known one in the series). This release, however, could just as easily be from some later period, even from the early to mid-1950s.

Davis also continued acquiring and assigning songs from his earlier companies and the following account accentuates the complex nature of music publishing. In 1948 he published a white gospel hymn, “What Would You Give in Exchange for Your Soul,” based on Matthew 16:26. A new arrangement had been given to the hymn published the previous year by Joe Davis Music Co., Inc. In turn Davis acquired it from Joseph M. Davis (music publishers) in 1941, which they had bought from William T. Pettengill in 1941. Pettengill renewed the original copyright of 1913,

which had then been assigned to the Metropolitan Church Association of Waukesha, Wisconsin. Music publishing is a complex business.

In March 1948, Davis received a fascinating letter from his old music associate, composer W. C. Handy. Its implications are such that it is well worth quoting in full.

Dear Friend:

I am sending you a copy of "LOVIN' BLUES" and, I hope you received the letter we sent you about our thirty years of activity on Broadway.

This song brings back memories and causes me to congratulate you on your achievements, since "LOVIN' BLUES" was published by us.

Now, brother Davis, when Petrillo lifts the ban, it would be a fine thing for you to record this once more so that we can hand you a royalty check before the copyright expires. Another thing, when the time comes for renewal (since we have not made you any money by the ten-cent stores going out of business) can't we work up some enthusiasm, so that when the time comes for the renewal of copyright you will be so highly pleased that you will let us publish it for the second copyright term.

You know, we used to get around together and have dinner occasionally—most of the time at your expense. By being seventy-four years old and so blind that I cannot see what the chicks look like, I have saved so much money, and it would be a pleasure if you would tell me when and where we can dine together at my expense. R.S.V.P.

All join me in best wishes to you.

Your friend,

W. C. Handy

Handy the shrewd businessman is evident throughout, but the letter is remarkable for its charm and honesty, and can only have been written by someone who knew the other well. It provides indisputable evidence that Davis and Handy dined together in the 1920s and is completely in keeping with Davis's attitude toward black writers, publishers, and artists throughout his life. Such a delightful request for a dinner engagement is all but irresistible and it is doubtful that Davis didn't meet his old friend.

A minor wrangle in the record field showed that Davis, despite his own assertions that he had left the record business, never quite totally divorced it from his other business activities. *The Billboard* for April 3, 1948, carried the caption "Mercury Drops Celeb Tag: Changed To Pop," for this story:

Mercury diskery in Chicago last week dropped its Celebrity Series label title after a minor conflict with Joe Davis's new disk label of the same name. The Celebrity Series (75 cents retail) has been changed to the Popular Series, and the former Popular Series (60 cents retail) will be called just plain Mercury.

According to Joe Davis, Mercury originally notified him some weeks ago (when Davis announced his intention to sell pressings from his backlog of masters under the Celebrity label) that the title was being used for one of its wax series. Davis's attorney this week contacted Mercury and argued that Davis had prior claim to the Celebrity tag, since he used it initially in 1944. Mercury thereupon decided to drop the Celebrity title.

Primarily to avoid the possibility of clashes of interest, record companies frequently warned each other of contractual obligations and holdings. Donald H. Gabor, president of Continental, wrote in the same month warning Davis that the Dixieaires (Johnny Hines, J. C. Ginyard, Jimmy Moran, Abe Green, and Tom Moran) remained under contract to him until April 20, 1949. Gabor's letter noted that "we believe it to be in our mutual interest to put you on notice with regard to the existence of the above exclusive contract."

The letter appears to have resulted from the Dixieaires extra-contractual recordings in February 1949, not only with Bob Shad's "Sittin' In With" label but also with the Rene Brothers's Exclusive label. Gabor recorded another session with them in March, just before the end of their contract, but by the summer they were off and running cutting further sides for Exclusive. Gabor presumably contacted Davis because of his earlier gospel releases, but he remained outside of the black gospel music field until the 1950s.

### Sleepy-Time in Caroline

During the summer of 1948, Davis revived "Sleepy-Time in Caroline" and plugged it for all he was worth. Correspondence with the writer Hal Moore from Spartanburg, South Carolina, shows just what sort of publicity campaign Davis could wage when he set his mind to it. Davis had maintained correspondence with Moore since 1941, when he served as the musical director of Spartanburg's radio station WSPA, including a brief stint as an



army sergeant in 1944. The Three Suns recorded the tune for Beacon in the early days and Eddie Dean cut a version in April 1942 for Decca (6034). Singin' Sam Frankel even recorded it as a transcription disc for Coca-Cola in that same month and eventually at a Davis session in April 1946.

Clearly excited by Davis's promotion of his song, Hal Moore wrote to Davis on May 20, 1948: "With everything going so well with our tune, I am so darn happy I can hardly hold myself down. Just received your letter telling me of the NBC network for the dedication of 'Sleepy-Time In Caroline' to the two Governors of the Carolinas on the two successive Saturdays, and have just written the letter, of which I enclose a copy, to Governor [Strom] Thurmond. The reason I think you have not heard from him as yet is that he has been so awfully busy at the Southern Democratic conventions in Alabama these past days." Strom Thurmond gained fame by the early 1960s when, as leader of the breakaway Southern Democrats, nicknamed the Dixiecrats, he threw their weight behind the Republican vote of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in the greatest upset in southern politics since the Populist movement of the late nineteenth century.

Moore excitedly wrote Davis that:

every radio station in the Southeast must be playing it up. Have heard from Charleston, Atlanta, Birmingham, Raleigh and Asheville, N.C., Columbia, Charlotte, Shelby, N.C., and Greenville and Anderson and Greenwood and every other station in South Carolina. Arthur Smith and his Carolina Crackerjacks had me to go along with them in Charlotte last Saturday night for their personal appearance show and network broadcast, and such ovations that I got you never heard tell of. They broadcast my tune and then had me come out to the mike in front of their 2200 people audience and make a speech.

Arthur and his gang will program it again on the National CBS hook-up Sunday June the 6th . . . at 7:30 to 8:00 o'clock EST on CBS. They receive more mail from New York City and Chicago on this broadcast than they do from the Southern States, so I feel that what they are doing for us is a wonderful plug.

He finally got to the point that was significant for Davis, the record and the sheet music:

The only criticism I have heard about the record is from a few people here and there who have said they didn't like Singin' Sam's rendition very well but I think it is fine. However this has not kept

them from buying the record or sheets. . . . One of Mr. Boney's representatives came down last Tuesday and stayed over till the next day covering all the retailers and juke box owners and got very good response. . . . Mr. Boney is coming down himself next week, and we have arranged to run a daily quiz on my program "Hal Moore by Request" and give as the daily prizes an autographed copy of the *Celebrity* or a couple sheets, whichever the winner desires.

George G. Boney, a record distributor from Kinston, North Carolina, also ran his own label, Elm Records. Correspondence flowed back and forth between Davis and Moore, and Davis's reply of August 23 to a letter of four days previously, shows the efforts, and tribulations, of plugging a song, as well as highlighting further important issues. He wrote:

I have been breaking my back on "Sleepy-Time In Caroline," but unfortunately, with all the plugs and everything, the response has not been too good. I doubt whether I have sold 500 copies since I started to work on it again.

I sent out 2300 vinylite pressings, and covered practically every station in the country, and with the contact men I had working, I can truthfully say I spent a minimum of \$5,000 on the song already but, unfortunately, there has been very little response.

The SINGIN' SAM master I recently sold to MGM records, and they will reissue it on September 10th. I have had some very big plugs on the song, and a lot of promises, but waltzes are very hard to start, as the bands and singers do not like to do them. Unless a freak record breaks through,—like, "You Can't Be True," a waltz is the hardest thing to put over. Even in your own locality, where you plugged away on it, the response has been practically nothing.

The distributor I had in North Carolina sold about twelve or fifteen hundred records, and then stuck me for a few hundred dollars; nevertheless, I will continue to play along with the song, because I feel that some day it may break through.

As far as your application for ASCAP, if you will write to them for an application, I would be only too pleased to endorse it for you, and also have F. Henri Klickman do the same.

That Davis sent out 2,300 DJ specials underscores his ability to plug a song. He always did like a waltz and thirty years later plugged "The Bridal Waltz" with equal fervor. Artists frequently believe their songs, or albums,

are selling better than they are, as any record producer can attest. Observers also assume, falsely, that publicity naturally “sells” a record. Davis showed here that this is not always true.

Davis’s problem with distributors was, and remains, one that affects all small labels. Certainly with all the regional hype Moore provided earlier in the year, one would have expected the North Carolina distributor (Boney?) to sell in excess of the fifteen hundred he moved. Davis’s friendship in his support for Moore’s application for ASCAP membership also typifies the man, while F. Henri Klickman, who arranged many of Davis’s songs, worked closely with Davis upon his return to record manufacture in 1952. Perhaps the most intriguing point in this letter is the reference to having sold the Singin’ Sam master to MGM.

On July 30 Davis wrote to a number of his contractors granting permission for MGM Records Division of Loew’s, Inc., to retain possession of certain of his property. This arrangement included masters, mothers, and stampers from Clark Phonograph Record Co. of Harrison, New Jersey, metal parts stored at Columbia Storage Warehouses in New York, and master recordings and safeties held at Empire Broadcasting Corp. *The Billboard* for September 11, 1948, ran a caption stating that “M-G-M Records Buys Masters From Joe Davis,” and observed that the terms of the deal “were not revealed.”

Various correspondence between Davis and Harry Meyerson at MGM concerned metalwork and safeties that Davis sent the company for audition. Davis further suggested a release of the 5 Red Cap issues, “I Learned a Lesson I’ll Never Forget” and “Sugar Lips”: “Try to release same as soon as possible, in view of the fact that Mercury has just listed ‘I Learned A Lesson I’ll Never Forget’ sung by Steve Gibson, who formerly was one of the original RED CAPS. I think in the advertising of this particular record it should be mentioned that this is the recording by the original 5 RED CAPS. The selection I suggested for the other side, ‘Sugar Lips,’ was never released, and I think it would make an ideal coupling.” In fact, “Sugar Lips” had been released on Beacon 7124 and was reviewed in *The Billboard* on October 18, 1944.

To what extent both parties fully consummated the deal remains unclear. A few couplings of Joe Davis material appeared on MGM records. However, the article stated that MGM had purchased “several thousand masters which were owned by Joe Davis.” That figure, certainly a vast exaggeration, gains immediate suspicion with its mention of an advertised \$50,000 sales figure, a ludicrously low figure for “several thousand

masters.” Likewise, had MGM purchased so many masters at such a price, the company would have been sure to have released a good many in order to recoup funds. Nonetheless, some safeties of these masters remained with MGM because when MGM’s pressing plant closed in the 1950s some of them inadvertently found their way to Savoy when it hurriedly collected its own metalwork and safeties. Some, such as “Mama Put Your Britches On” by the 5 Red Caps, were supposedly sent as “safeties” to MGM, but they were found among Davis’s effects almost thirty years later.

MGM most certainly did not get all Joe Davis’s masters, and some recording sheets, such as the 1945 Magnolia Five session, are clearly marked “MGM did not get these masters.” Others were leased rather than sold outright as correspondence dated November 12 revealed, regarding “Sugar Lips,” “Gabriel’s Band,” “Playing the Field,” and “Don’t Go Back on Your Word.” The last two titles were by Bon Bon.

The 5 Red Caps’ recording of Irene Higginbotham’s “Boogie Woogie on a Saturday Night” appeared on MGM, which possibly prompted correspondence between Davis and ASCAP. Herman Finkelstein, resident counsel for ASCAP, wrote to Davis regarding this title:

This work was copyrighted by Joe Davis Music Co., Inc., on June 1, 1944, and thereby became part of the ASCAP repertoire. The Society cannot consent to your taking this out of the ASCAP repertoire and placing it in Beacon Music Co., which is a BMI affiliate. Our license agreements with our members require us to make available to them as a part of our repertoire, the musical compositions copyrighted by our members. This composition was copyrighted by Joe Davis Music Co., Inc., a member of the Society, and must be made available to our licensees under their respective license agreements. A member may not deliberately take a composition out of the ASCAP repertoire and thus deprive our licensees of the full benefit of the ASCAP licenses.

Davis must have been acutely aware of this issue for it mirrors the problem facing Edward B. Marks in its suit against ASCAP in 1940. Just to cement the point, Finkelstein added that he was sending a copy of the letter to BMI. One outcome of this decision occurred when Irene Higginbotham wrote some new titles for Beacon Music in 1952–1953; in order to enter BMI she adopted the nom de plume (which Davis’s wife, Bertha, also occasionally used) of Glenn Gibson.

For all his erratic departures from and returns to the record manufacturing business during 1948, by the end of the year Davis finally appeared through. The 51st Street building with its special marketing provisions was gone, some of his catalogue of records had been sold or leased to MGM, and the remaining stocks of albums were being sold off. Late in September, Sig Warshauer for the Krauss Company of New Orleans, with outlets on Canal, Basin, Crozat, and Iberville Streets, inquired after deleted stock: "Sometime ago you were kind enough to send us a list of albums which you had at close-out prices. At that time we were overstocked and were unable to take advantage of your offer. We are now placing our orders for the coming season and would appreciate your latest list of prices."

Some of these records sold quite well. As of July 28, 1948, Davis had paid \$2,729.32 in royalties on sales of 72,782 copies of Harry James's records to Wright Record Corp., of Meriden, Connecticut, which now owned Varsity and Royale. Ironically, Eli Oberstein (who had originally recorded the material for Varsity) wrote to Davis asking for royalties for Wright Record Corp. reminding Joe Davis that he wasn't the only veteran who moved in and out of the record business as times changed. However, if Oberstein was back in by the end of 1948, Davis was most definitely out . . . for the foreseeable future.

### Daddy's Little Girl

Despite Davis's clear indication in 1948 that he was leaving the record manufacturing business, *The Billboard* issue for New Year's Day 1949 nonetheless carried the caption Davis May Revive Beacon Record Co. Perhaps the official ending of the AFM ban in mid-December 1948 had made him think again; perhaps he just wished to keep his name in the public eye—or at least, where it could be noticed by the trade. The report stated: "Joe Davis, owner of the Beacon and Murray Wizell pubberies, last week put his entire professional staff (Mickey Addy, Harry Bernie and Coast operative Dan Cameron) on three weeks notice. Although replacements were not set at press time, Davis indicated that his immediate plans concern the reactivation of his Beacon Record Company, which will specialize in the race field."

Davis's tight finances forced him to consider laying off his staff. No evidence exists that he seriously intended getting back into the record business, although four-tune pop music sessions with Vincent Lopez's orchestra and Diane Courtney and Marshall Young date from this period.

Davis brought back country bluesman Gabriel Brown for a further session, but this wasn't reported in the trade press until May and the session finally occurred in August. Nothing suggests that Davis planned to record any other race material during a year in which his big song hits were "Daddy's Little Girl" and "Queen of the Poconos."

Always eager to bolster his song publishing business, on March 15, 1949, Davis sent a Western Union telegram to seven of the record world's major A&R men, Jack Kapp at Decca, Steve Sholes at RCA, Mamie Sacks at Columbia, Bob Thiele at Signature, Walter Rivers at Capitol, Mitch Miller at Mercury, and Harry Meyerson at MGM: "Just took over all rights to a song entitled 'Queen of the Poconos,' a great song that has already sold forty thousand records on a label called 'Shawnee' in Pennsylvania. Suggest you record same immediately. Will gladly send you lead sheet upon request." Not surprisingly, Davis followed his own advice and recorded it by accordionist Joe Biviano, backed by a ballad.

At this time one black female singer—Paula Watson—received considerable publicity following her initial record releases, inspiring Davis to file her name away for future reference and then record her in 1953. Paula Watson enjoyed a big hit on Supreme with "A Little Bird Told Me," covered also by a range of singers from Blue Lu Barker, Rose Murphy, and Evelyn Knight to Jerry Wayne. *The Billboard* for March 5 called Watson "the Supreme line's star." Supreme's New York City distribution was handled by Black & White and managed by Larry Newton. A year earlier, when Davis reactivated his Celebrity label to cash in on Savannah Churchill's success, Larry Newton worked as his sales manager. Perhaps Newton's links with Supreme came in handy when Davis chose eventually to record Paula Watson.

Early in April, Davis heard from one of his old contacts from the 1920s, Eddie Green. Now managing Sepia Productions in Los Angeles, Green had written to offer a song: "I am sending you this record of 'You Can Always Believe Your Heart.' This was taken from the sound track of the picture 'Mr. Adam's Bomb' which I have just produced. This was a short subject produced by us primarily for the Colored theatres. I think I mentioned this to you when I was in New York last summer. This tune should be a great tune for the Mills Brothers or a quartette like them. I am sending it to you because I believe that you, being there in the big City, could reach them better than I can out here."

Addressing him as Eddie, Davis wrote back immediately: "You know how it always gives me great pleasure to hear from you. As soon as I receive the record of 'You Can Always Believe Your Heart,' I will be only

too pleased to go over it, and if you have any other songs, please send them to me, as I sure would like to publish a few things more by you." Davis could hardly have been more supportive, once again demonstrating how his old-time musical contacts kept reappearing in friendly form and often over several decades.

A week after Davis replied to Eddie Green, he received a brief letter from Eli Oberstein, once more back with Varsity and Royale and based at 47 West 63rd Street in New York City. Concise and to the point it ran: "Do you have any masters that you want to dispose of? If you do, please send me a list and your lowest possible price. We want them for a low-priced record deal." Davis's files contain no reply to Oberstein's query.

Completely out of context, Davis decided to record one of his earliest artists in whom he continually held faith, Gabriel Brown. *The Billboard* in May 1949 reported that "Joe Davis re-signed blues warbler-guitarist Gabriel Brown prior to return to cutting race platters." This marked the second time in 1949 that *The Billboard* speculated that Davis might return to the record business. But in all probability, it's likely no more than shrewd PR work masterminded by Davis in order to keep his name active. Davis more likely wished to lease these Gabriel Brown titles, although he already held four sides still unreleased.

The midweek session commenced at 2:00 P.M. on August 3, 1949, at the RCA Studios at 153 East 24th Street in New York City. Local 802 member 3253 received \$82.50 (the flat Union rate) for four titles: "Hold Me Baby," "Nobody Loves Like My Little Girl," "I Can't Last Long," and "Suffer." The 5000 series matrix numbers, specifically allocated to Davis's blues artists, had lapsed, so he allocated them matrix numbers in the new DA 100 series, running from DA 108 through DA 111, respectively.

Wasting no time, Davis wrote five days later to Steve Sholes at RCA, sending him playbacks of the four Gabriel Brown selections recorded at his own studios. Sholes had actually been out of town for an extended period and he didn't reply until late September: "Unfortunately I cannot use him right," he wrote somewhat ambiguously, "and am therefore returning the records." Did he mean "right now," or simply that he was not in a position to market such country blues material? After all, RCA was still recording country blues (for want of a better term) such as Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup and Jazz Gillum, although in a small group context rather than solo artists. Meanwhile, Davis received the "lacquers and tapes of the recording session which was cut in our studio on August 2, 1949, job No.

31D-1000" from Ralph C. Williams at RCA's Custom Record Sales Section. Oddly, the date of recording is at variance with Davis's notes, but Davis was correct as the session took place on Wednesday, August 3, 1949.

Two weeks later Davis received a letter from Isabelle Marks at Decca, stating: "Enclosed herewith please find signed copy of our agreement covering purchase of two master records entitled 'I Can't Last Long' and 'Suffer.' P.S. We are also enclosing check to your order in the sum of \$200.00 as of our contract." Davis wasted no time in placing half the session once RCA had turned down his offer. Within a few months the two titles were released on Coral 65019 with typical Coral matrix numbers.

Decca launched their "subsidiary wax-works" (*The Billboard*) in October 1948, including a "Negro series" on Coral with releases by Mahalia Jackson and the Famous Blue Jay Singers. *The Billboard* for October 8, 1949, ran a short note under the caption:

#### DECCA GETS TWO SIDES FROM JOE DAVIS

Joe Davis, who has been utilizing his Beacon and Celebrity diskeries to promote his Beacon Music publications, turned over to Decca two sides last week. The masters, by blues singer-guitarist Gabriel Brown, will be issued in October on Decca's subsidiary Coral label.

Gabriel found himself in good company and a label with far wider distribution. The remaining two titles by the guitarist remained unissued, but Davis hadn't forgotten them. They were also, without any question, the two best titles recorded at the session.

In August Davis prepared to launch a new song, "Daddy's Little Girl," which reflected Davis's side:

Little girl of mine, with eyes of shining blue,  
Little girl of mine, I love you, yes I do;  
No one could be so sweet,  
You have made my life complete:

Chorus: You're the end of the rainbow, my pot of gold,  
You're DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL to have and hold;  
A precious gem is what you are,  
You're mommy's bright and shining star.



Whatever one might think of the lyrics by Bobby Burke and Horace Gerlach, it set the cash registers in action. Some sheet music simply carried pictures of groups who had recorded it, like the Lennie Herman Quintet (Latin American), but as it gained popularity, Davis quickly ran competitions to place pictures of some daddy's little girl on the front. One winner was the daughter of Eddie Hubbard, DJ over Station WIND, Chicago, while Eileen Enright won the competition held by the DJ of Station KYW, Philadelphia, Jack Pyle.

*Cashbox* for December 17, 1949, carried a quarter-page advertisement for a version of "Daddy's Little Girl" on Rainbow 80088 by crooner Dick Todd, with Eddie "Piano" Miller's orchestra. In England, Decca issued versions by Billy Cotton and Frankie Vaughan (Deccas F.9479 and F.9465, respectively) and in Holland there was a text by Hans van der Mee as "Vader's Kleine Meid." The ever-vigilant and persistent Davis continued pushing the song well into the spring of 1950, both in print and over the airwaves.

Wayne Cody, DJ over Philadelphia's Station WIP, as Uncle WIP, interviewed Joe Davis on April 27, 1950, about the song. In a mutual back-scratch, Davis said, "In August last year . . . when I sent [the song] to you, you had the courtesy to phone me up and tell me you thought it'd be a hit. . . . If you analyse the song, the melody is beautiful and plaintive . . . it appeals to everybody." Davis then explained why he was on the show: "In my thirty years of music publishing I never really believed in a follow-up but due to the great demand from the public . . . and disc-jockeys . . . I've brought this manuscript. . . . As you introduced 'Daddy's Little Girl' I think it'd be an honour if you introduced this song." Hardly surprisingly Davis rolled out "Daddy's Little Boy," which hit for him in 1950, even if not quite the same-sized smash as the original.

Perhaps the ultimate accolade for "Daddy's Little Girl" came when it appeared in the November 26, 1950, Sunday comic strip, *Dick Tracy*. In the plot, a man has been in a coma in a hospital for twelve days with no means of breaking the coma. However, the man's long-lost but recently located daughter is brought to the hospital to sing for kids in one of the wards. Sparkle, the daughter, introduces her first song with the words, "My first number is dedicated to my pappy, wherever he is! Mammy and me want him to come back home." After this, singing and playing guitar, she breaks into "Daddy's Little Girl." You can guess the outcome, which must have delighted Joe Davis.

On September 26, 1949, Davis signed a contract with trumpeter Phil Napoleon for a special arrangement of Strauss's "Blue Danube," once again

lapsing from his resolution not to become involved in recording. Pleased with results from RCA's East 24th Street studios, where he recorded Gabriel Brown in August, Davis set up a session with Napoleon's band for the afternoon of October 4, perhaps hoping that Steve Sholes at RCA would be interested in the final product. Napoleon and his band recorded four titles—"When the Saints Go Marching In," "Fair Jennie's Lament" (written by Irene Higginbotham), "Alabama Blues," and "Blue Danube." In April and May Napoleon's Emperors of Jazz had cut sixteen titles for the Swan label with a band including many of the same participants from the 1946 Betty Thornton session—Frank Signorelli, Felix Giobbe, and Sal Franzella. The drummer throughout was the former Original Dixieland Jazz Band musician Tony Spargo (Sbarbaro).

The AFM recording contract sheet named the third selection "Bessemer, Alabama Blues" (written in ink by Davis), probably to avoid clashing with the 1920s title, "Alabama Blues." Davis also wrote "Fair Jennie's Lament" above a crossed-out original choice of "Basin Street Boogie," a Davis-penned tune recorded by Deryck Sampson. Napoleon assembled an excellent little band, with only Tony Spargo remaining from the Swan session. On trombone was the little-recorded Andy Russo, while the fluent, creative Phil Olivella played clarinet. The underappreciated Billy Maxted appeared on piano and bassist Jack Fay completed the rhythm section. The band collected \$288.75 with standard AFM rates of \$41.25 to the sidemen and double for the leader.

Davis never released the titles himself but apparently sold them to Decca in March 1950; at least a letter of March 23, 1950, promised that "as soon as the contracts are signed by Mr. David Kapp, a copy will be sent to you for your records." No contract, however, remains among Davis's effects. Of the four titles recorded by Davis only "Blue Danube" and "Alabama Blues" (thus titled) survived on acetate. Oddly, Decca eventually recorded Phil Napoleon's Memphis Five themselves, in March 1950, recording the same titles. Released on a ten-inch long-playing record, they feature Cutty Cutshall on trombone and Sonny Weldon on piano. The tunes clearly remained in Davis's mind, for when he recorded Castle's Jazz Band in the mid-1950s, he included three titles (sans "Blue Danube") from his 1949 Napoleon session. The first Davis session seemingly remained in Napoleon's memory, too, for in 1959 he again cut "Come Back to Sorrento," with a young Kenny Davern on clarinet.

On the publicity front, Davis recalled his early use of the governors of the Carolinas to publicize "Sleepy-Time in Caroline." Roy J. Turner,

governor of Oklahoma, wrote both words and music to “My Memory Trail,” introduced by an old colleague of Davis’s, Vincent Lopez with his Hotel Taft Orchestra. Naturally, Davis was prepared to aim lower than governor. “Let’s Keep Our City Clean” featured words by Bert Kapp, seemingly in honor of Frank P. Zeidler, mayor of Milwaukee, Wisconsin:

For cleanliness will bring good health,  
And health is worth much more than wealth;  
You wouldn’t wear a dirty shirt,  
So, let’s not walk around in dirt.

Lawrence Welk, perhaps fittingly, wrote the music. The events of 1949 demonstrate that Joe Davis enjoyed the most success with songs aimed at the popular field, a fact that didn’t escape his attention.

Davis maintained an eye toward regional and local sales and the Wisconsin *Oconomowoc Enterprise* of January 26, 1950, proved the importance of micro-marketing. With great pride the newspaper reported that “Oconomowoc may be on the Musical Map shortly. ‘I Went For A Walk In Oconomowoc’ originally introduced over WTMJ two months ago on Jack Teter Rhythm Club. ‘had all the ear marks of a hit’ [according to Joe] Davis.”

Nonetheless, the ongoing success of “Daddy’s Little Girl” sparked a strong interest in finding his next popular national success. The *New York Enquirer* for March 6 ran a headline:

Joe Davis has big hit in “Daddy’s Little Girl”

Dick Todd’s cover boosted sales in New England; the 1st release after Joe Davis’ on Celebrity by Henry Jerome. To date it is released on Bux-Mont, Capitol, Columbia (2), Coral, Dance Tone, Decca, London, Mercury, MGM, Rainbow, Skatin’ Toone, Varsity and Victor.

Little wonder that Davis was pleased to see the loyal links he maintained with Decca/Coral and MGM as well as a lease to Eli Oberstein’s revamped Varsity label pay off so handsomely. “Daddy’s Little Girl” enjoyed innumerable broadcasts by a wide variety of bands. Within the same September week, for instance, Lawrence Welk played it at 10:15 P.M. over Chicago’s WBBM, a performance recorded by Modern Recording Studios on West

Wacker Drive, and Bob Crosby covered it nationwide at 7:00 P.M. on September 15 on “Campbell Soup Time.”

Having run a series of publicity contests to find photographs of little girls for “Daddy’s Little Girl,” he ran a powerful campaign to find the typical “DADDY’S LITTLE BOY,” which ballyhooed: “He’ll win . . . picture on title page and a \$500.00 savings bond. The winning contestant,” he promised, “would be notified by December 1, 1950,” adding, to heighten the suspense, “by telephone, telegram or mail.” The contest closed on November 15 and the judges (besides Davis) included orchestra leader Jan Garber (with whom Davis had close ties for years), vocalist and “Star of Coca Cola Program” Morton Downey, Bill Simon from *The Billboard*, and New York’s WJZ-AM DJ Norman Brokenshire. Never one to miss a trick, Davis also offered a \$100.00 savings bond to the storeowner from whom the winner obtained the entry blank. By this time “Daddy’s Little Boy” had been recorded by the Mills Brothers (Decca), Jan Garber (Capitol), Eddy Howard (Mercury), Dick Todd (Rainbow), and Hugh Ashley on Varsity.

“I Went for a Walk in Oconomowoc” stands out among the four titles recorded by Bob Houston with the Paul Taubman trio backing him. On May 8, Bob Houston returned to the studios—once more those of RCA on East 24th Street, New York City—to recut one of the earlier titles, “In the Valley of Golden Dreams,” and “Mama Mia” with a fourteen-piece band under the leadership of Henry Levine. Scattered among these were sax men Hank D’Amico and Nick Caiazza (who had both been on Davis’s 1945 Wingy Manone session), Felix Giobbe on bass (notably on the 1946 Frank Signorelli and Betty Thornton sessions—on one of the Thornton sessions with Hank D’Amico), and Sam Persoff, who had been on Davis’s Maxine Sullivan session from 1944. Davis seemingly aimed to record only these two titles. Two days later RCA produced single-sided vinyl tests, which Davis approved and released on his Celebrity label. Confusingly, Davis allocated it Celebrity 7120, which had been used (on other of his labels) for a 5 Red Caps coupling.

*The Billboard* in September noted that “the Southernaires are cutting four sides for Joe Davis’ Beacon label next week. The tunes will all be Davis’ publications. The group assumes its Sunday show over WJZ September 24.” Whether or not the session took place remains unclear, as does exactly what type of music was on tap. Davis certainly had plenty of black gospel tunes in his catalogue but his only known black gospel release was recorded—or at least allocated a matrix number—in mid-May 1954.

In December Davis was offered world rights, excluding the British Isles, for a tune stated as being “our number one plug” by Mesnes Music Publishing of London’s Denmark Street, for \$500.00 and “usual royalties.” Two weeks later Mesnes followed up with cuttings from two English newspapers: one a cartoon spoofing a comment from the British Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to the effect that pigs with straight tails were ill, while the other was a photograph of a group of people (including English comedian Arthur Askey) measuring pigs’ tails. These events led Davis to discover a new outlet: recordings for children.

## Chapter Nine

# The Deep River Boys

Throughout 1951 Davis recorded popular artists, often covering children's songs. The Art Waner Orchestra with Andy Pierce and the Song Spinners produced a sizable seller with "Easter Bunny Day," part-written by Joseph W. Burns, who produced another huge seller for Davis a couple of years later. Bud Brees with Paul Taubman tackled such stalwarts as "Toyland Jubilee" and "Circus on Parade." "Ev'ry Little Piggy's Got a Curly Tail," and another big seller, "Percy the Pale Faced Polar Bear" received the careful attention of Lenny Herman's quintet. An old Davis hit, "Dreamy Housatonic," moved geographically to become "Dreamy Susquehanna" and Dick Todd covered an old Davis tune, "Nighty-Night." In the middle of this batch Davis tucked a session by a fair female singer, Betty Madigan, which before long focused his attention back on more adult music.

Washington, D.C.-based Betty Madigan came to Davis's notice via Art Lamb, a local DJ who saw her perform on WTTG-TV. In May she wrote Davis from the Hotel Twenty-Four Hundred where she was singing: "I am enclosing the recording that you asked me to make of 'Everyone Needs Someone.' Sorry to be so tardy but it has taken me a little while to complete arrangements for the recording session with musicians etc. I liked your tune so much that I wanted to try it out with more than just a piano."

The audition recording clearly impressed Davis and he quickly arranged a session at a Washington, D.C., studio for July 11. Davis oversaw the session and in typical meticulous fashion, he noted that it commenced at 1:15 p.m. Betty Madigan's backing band (the smart D.C. society band of Beach Johnson) showed itself capable of swinging nicely. On "Blue Fog" Davis noted that Johnson played clarinet and "sax," unusually uninformative for him. Aurally it is clear that Johnson played a "straight alto," what Roland Kirk called a "strich" in the 1960s, with a bell curved slightly less than on a B-flat clarinet.

Drummer Joe Nardy, who recorded in London in 1946 in excellent company, perhaps helps explain why this session swung so nicely. Possibly a member of the American U.S.O. program, Nardy recorded a few titles in a jam session organized by English bandleader and guitarist Vic Lewis, along with other American guests, notably cornetist Jimmy McPartland, his wife Marian McPartland on piano, and clarinetist Clarence Magnusson, a one-time member of the U.S. Army Air Force band. British reedmen Ronnie Chamberlain and Jimmy Skidmore completed a fine front line.

Betty Madigan, who performed over WTTG-TV as well as at many society venues in Washington, D.C., such as the King Cole Room, Old New Orleans, and Colony Lounge, appeared quite content to accept \$50.00 for the four titles and fired off a Western Union telegram to Davis two days after the session agreeing to the contract. Davis issued all these titles when he came back into the record business seriously in 1953, while Betty Madigan went on to record for MGM, almost certainly through Davis's good offices. By 1954 her version of "Joey" for MGM gained her first place in *The Billboard's* poll of "Best Newcomers." Ms. Madigan had her own radio and TV shows in Washington, D.C., over television station WTTG and WTOP radio before retiring from the public eye in the mid-1990s.

Davis, as was his habit, kept in touch with his various contacts across the country, such as Frank Kelton, who wrote Davis on WSM notepaper in January 1951. Kelton reminded him of the acetates (along with lead sheets) of the Jordanaires he'd sent Davis with the admonition that "it's not too easy to get a lead sheet made from the quartette arrangements." Kelton included news about a new singer, Paul Lee: "I will be with . . . Tex Williams this afternoon—Tex is guest star on the 'Opry' to-night on the Red Foley-Prince Albert show. I hope that things work out—so that we can tie up one or two originals that will be recorded on Capitol. . . . things in general are moving along okay [but] the Hill & Range competition is not easy to overcome here."

Intimation regarding competition from this major country music publishing company possibly prompted Davis to write direct to Red Foley at WSM: "On November 10, 1950 I signed contracts with you for . . . 'Heavy Heart.' When these contracts were signed, Frank Kelton was in my employ and he assured me that you would record this song for Decca. I feel that this is a great song and I hate to see it go to waste, so if you feel that you cannot make a record of it, I wish you would be kind enough to send me a release." Release or no release, it seems to have gone "to waste."

Unlike other East Coast independent record labels, such as Savoy and Manor in New York City or nearby New Jersey or Palda and Gotham in Philadelphia, Davis stayed away from black gospel groups since the mid-1940s and his releases by the Reverend J. C. Burnett and the Galilee Singers. In March 1951, Thurman Elliott, a member of the Starlight Four Quartette of Claremont, Virginia, wrote to Davis pointing out: "we are a singing group (colored), (5) five men and a guitar doing spiritual numbers, heard weekly over Station W.H.Y.V. Newport News, Va. Being possessed with a desire to make a record for publication, we request information of you concerning the same."

Davis wrote back directly: "If you can send me an air check of your group, I can assure you I will give it every consideration for a recording." No evidence exists that the group responded to Davis's reasonable request. However, a Starlight Four recorded for the small Philadelphia-based Melford label shortly afterward, so maybe the group achieved their "desire to make a record for publication."

Perhaps the contact with this group prompted Davis to arrange his last recordings for the year, a session on December 20 with a black vocal quartet, the Deep River Boys, who also were recorded for Davis the following year. At this December 1951 session, Harry Douglas, Vernon Gardner, Edward Ware, and Carter Wilson cut four titles, including their cover of Bon Bon's big hit, "Truthfully." Guitarist on the session, Tony Gottuso, reappeared later as a session man for Davis when he returned full-time to recording. The year after the Deep River Boys' recording of "Truthfully," the original guitarist on the Bon Bon session cut a version for RCA. *Cashbox* for November 15, 1952, stated that Steve Gibson's version was "breaking big." "Truthfully" remained a firm favorite with Davis and his 1974 twelve-inch long-playing album of various rhythm and blues titles included the Deep River Boys' version of the song.

Davis probably waited until their RCA contract ended before he approached the Deep River Boys to record for him, to say nothing of fitting a recording session in with tight touring schedules, mostly overseas. The *New York Amsterdam News* of May 14, 1949, pointed out that they would be in Europe "until next December." The group returned to Europe the following year and the October 7, 1950, edition of the same newspaper carried a headline DEEP RIVER BOYS STOP SHOW IN FAMED THEATER as well as a report that the Deep River Boys were unable to escape repeated encores at the London Palladium until the orchestra played the national



anthem! Their manager, W. T. Kirkeby, also reported no open dates before January 22. Better known as “Ed” Kirkeby, the one-time manager of Fats Waller was with the entertainer when he died and it’s a small wonder that the group later signed with Davis.

### Fine as Wine

Ten years after Davis initially changed direction and plunged into the manufacture of records, he was about to repeat the process. This time Davis plunged in even deeper. His music publishing business didn’t suffer from neglect but, by the end of the year, the record business once more gained his primary focus. Running on adrenalin, Davis threw himself into the recording business, although he shrewdly tested the waters on behalf of another record company before again deciding to invest his own money.

Nineteen fifty-two commenced with few signs that Davis would reenter the record business that he left behind in 1947. Indeed, his first significant session of the year didn’t occur until April, when he again recorded the Deep River Boys, this time with the stalwart Frank Signorelli on piano. Never one to give up trying to push his favorite songs, the Deep River Boys recorded two old 5 Red Caps titles: “No One Else Will Do,” which sold well originally on Joe Davis 7130, and “I’m the One,” which had been his Red Caps release on Beacon 115. The session commenced, however, with “Sleepy Little Cowboy,” which Davis decided to plug. *The Billboard* for May 3 stated that “Joe Davis of Beacon Music is hitting all TV stations with a three-minute film to exploit its Beacon dishing of ‘Sleepy Little Cowboy.’ The TV film consists of cartoon stills, illustrating the tune. Sound track, the Deep River Boys’ Beacon waxing of the song, is dubbed onto the film.” It must, therefore, be one of the earliest music videos specifically made with television in mind.

In between recording the Deep River Boys, Davis signed another black vocal group, the 5 Barons from Philadelphia. This secular group, more than even the Deep River Boys, triggered an extensive series of recordings of black secular vocal groups by Davis. The April 3 contract with the Philadelphia group encompassed the publishing for “Fine as Wine,” written by a local promoter Charles Roisman, presumably the link between Davis and the 5 Barons. In typical fashion, Davis remained in touch with Roisman some fifteen years later regarding “Fine as Wine.”

The only known recording by the group was of this title, and it survived only on a single-sided pressing labeled as Beacon 9144, which presumably did not enjoy a commercial release. Before long, however, the Crickets (not Buddy Holly's group) covered "Fine as Wine," implying that Davis saw no further use for the 5 Barons. Aurally, this musical quartet led by guitarist Sam Alexander, plus vocalist Ernest Ambrister, proved decidedly rough compared with the Crickets and Deep River Boys. Beacon 9144 appears to be no more than a promotional disc to secure publicity for the tune.

Nearly five months lapsed before Davis reentered the studios. On September 8, he recorded the popular piano duet of Arthur Ferrante and Louis Teicher, cutting four selections. The duo recorded a far smoother version of "Boogie Express" than Deryck Sampson's original. Their second selection—originally called "St. Louis Boogie"—was recast "Mississippi Boogie" on their contract. Perhaps Davis wished no conscious riding on the coattails of W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues." Two very different titles, "High, High, High" and "African Echoes," completed the session.

Perhaps those piano boogies caused Davis to consider recording some of the jazz that he liked and he contacted Fred Norman, a trombonist and arranger with Claude Hopkins in the 1930s. Recalling the big band groups of Walter Thomas, Davis contracted Norman to gather an excellent aggregation of top jazzmen for a twelve-piece band, to be variously released as by Fred Norman and His Orchestra and as the Jump Town Orchestra. Noted jazz critic Leonard Feather wrote notes to an extended-play seven-inch disc: "Leading the stellar saxophone section in the 'Jump Town Orchestra' is Hymie Schertzer, renowned as first alto man with the original and memorable Benny Goodman Orchestra of the mid-1930s. With him are George Dorsey, a Benny Carter alumnus, on alto; Buddy Tate of Basie band fame on tenor, and Dave McRae on baritone . . . In the rhythm section are pianist Shorty Allen, in whose own Arcadia Ballroom band such Jazz greats as Kai Winding spent their fledgling days; guitarist Danny Perri, another CBS house man; Cedric Wallace, a member of the Fats Waller sextet that made recorded history; and Norris 'Bunny' Shawker, who has recorded with Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald." Add to that a brass section with Taft Jordan, Dicky Vance, and Red Solomon on trumpets and Benny Morton on trombone, and you have a very fine band. Guitarist Perri, by the way, recorded in England with the bands of Jack Hylton (1936–1937) and Lew Stone (1939–1940).

The session, held at WOR on September 25, paid each of the musicians the scale rate of \$41.25 and a few of the names written in pencil in

Norman's meticulous script do not immediately reconcile with Feather's notes: George H. Tate, Melven [*sic*] Solomon, and H. S. Morton, for instance. Norman's list actually shows the drummer as Terry Snyder, while the AFM notes deleted his name with Shawker's as a substitution. The group recorded four titles including two takes of the final tune, "Feeling Sentimental." A measure of the thoroughness of the session is that both takes were complete, yet were the fourth and fifth attempted. Oddly, the fourth take was released in the 1950s, although all have now been reissued.

The remaining three tunes all changed titles between recording and release. "Walkin' Down Main Street," the first title recorded, became "Jump Town"; "Dance & Be Merry" changed mood to become "The Miseries"; while "Rockin' Through Georgia" moved nearby to become "Jersey Turnpike." The writer is shown as Glenn Gibson, which here served as a pseudonym for Irene Higginbotham. Significantly, the Jump Town Orchestra's titles were registered with BMI; Irene remained with ASCAP. Norman later formed a vocal group, The Normanaires, who recorded for MGM in 1953—probably at Davis's instigation. Airshots of the group exist backed by a big band, which, aurally and logically, sound substantially like the Jump Town Orchestra.

Although Davis was probably consulting with MGM about their virtually nonexistent rhythm and blues catalogue, he couldn't know that this session heralded a renewed period of recording activity. Unbeknown to Davis, his September 1952 contract with Otis Blackwell (signed by his mother, Addie, because he was a juvenile) proved to be enormously significant. The contract required Otis Blackwell to make "sixteen commercial sound recordings for the sum of Fifty dollars for each group of four recordings," standard for the time. Otis Blackwell eventually emerged as Davis's most notable recording artist of the 1950s and a prolific songwriter, probably best known today because of his tunes recorded early in the career of Elvis Presley.

In October Davis wrote to Steve Sholes at RCA, informing him: "I'm enclosing my personal contracts with the two artists, Otis Blackwell and Gabriel Brown, who Joe Thomas would like to record." Sholes rejected Gabriel Brown in 1949 when Davis had offered him some recordings, so it seems odd that RCA's A&R man, Joe Thomas (the alto sax-playing brother of Walter Thomas), would want him. Around the same time Davis signed tenor sax man Frank Culley, for two song titles, "Let's Keep Cool" and "Flying Sausages," specifically recorded for RCA on October 22. A letter from Stephen Sholes early in November stated "please find four copies each of

the contract for Frank Culley, and Otis Blackwell” and about a week later Otis Blackwell recorded his first session for RCA. Sholes’s letter failed to mention Gabriel Brown, whom Davis had taken back into the studio the previous month. However, by that time, Davis’s relationship with MGM transformed his entire business model.

In Davis’s own words, he went “with MGM as an independent producer, to start a rhythm and blues catalogue.” At that time, MGM’s R&B roster consisted of Ivory Joe Hunter. *The Billboard* had headlined the event in its October 29, 1949, edition: “M-G-M Cracks Blues Field, Gets Hunter,” further reporting that “M-G-M Records this week grabbed off its first important blues and rhythm artist when the diskery inked and recorded Ivory Joe Hunter.” Apart from a few leases from Joe Davis in 1948 the label simply didn’t step into this rapidly expanding field. MGM’s Frank Walker, clearly worried, contacted his old colleague from the 1920s, resulting in Davis becoming, in his own words, “the first independent producer in the biz.” Davis financed all the dates himself with an understanding that MGM would release an agreed-upon number of sides per month on extremely short leases. Davis took to the road for ten days a month, covering the country to visit distributors and DJs. He must have been glad to be back in the game he knew so well.

*The Billboard* for November 1, 1952, under a heading *Beacon Inks R&B Talent*, reported that Davis had “recently signed a flock of r&b talent to personal contracts, and has placed a number of them with diskeries.” Davis signed his contract with MGM on October 14 and within two weeks *The Billboard* reported signings such as “Blues singer Basil Spears, thrush Eileen Redfield, Eddie Carter and the Carter-Rays, singer Gabriel Brown, blues shouter Millie Bosman, tenorman Sammy Taylor and Clarence Palmer and the Jive Bombers, all placed with MGM.” The writer’s pot-luck descriptions require some revisions: Millie Bosman shouts on neither of her blues, Miss Redfield’s name was actually Irene, while Gabriel Brown is made to sound like a popular vocalist. Although Sammy Taylor worked as a sideman on many Joe Davis sessions, he never recorded under his own name as part of the MGM lease, although he became one of their best sellers as a sax instrumentalist. Perhaps contractual problems with Lou Parker’s Citation Records of Detroit prevented the Clarence Palmer group from finally recording.

The same edition of *The Billboard* commented that “Otis Blackwell, blues singer, and tenorman Frank Culley were set on the RCA label.” The report also mentioned Davis’s new staff: “Davis also signed Vin Strong,

organist and composer, to write for his music firm, as well as ork leader Eddie Wilcox, who waxes for the Derby label. Norman Lee, another Davis pactee, was recently signed by Derby.” In a world rife with such connections, Eddie Wilcox once co-led the Jimmy Lunceford band with current RCA’s A&R man Joe Thomas.

The clear link at this time between Davis and Derby Records almost certainly resulted from Larry Newton’s presidency of Derby. In 1948 Newton served as Davis’s sales manager with the promotion of his Celebrity label at the top of his list. The following year he moved to another New York City-based label, Black & White. A mid-1952 Derby release by Jerry Wayne, the artist for whom Davis had initially entered the recording business in 1942, provides yet another connection among these men. Later that year Derby issued Sammy Cotton’s “Saturday Evening Blues,” which Davis had published for him. And a previous Derby release by Ginny Gibson with the Song Spinners and Paul Taubmann was actually the backing group that Davis used for the past two years. These titles were recorded by him and then allocated DA matric numbers; DA 170 and 171 for release by Newton on his label.

In early 1953 ex-Supreme hit singer Paula Watson cut some sides for Davis. While managing Black & White, Newton worked hard promoting this promising young singer. These myriad connections underscore how and why Wilcox went to work for Davis and Norman Lee found employment with Newton at Derby.

*The Billboard* for December 20 reported in great detail MGM’s deeper involvement in the R&B field. Frank Walker was quoted as saying that “the diskery will ship out copies of all r&b platters to a selected group of jocks thruout the country, and will go all-out promotion-wise on the disks.” The article also forecast the rising demand for R&B material though inaccurately predicted that “1953 will see much stronger competition from the majors in this market.” In fact, in the end, only one group brought in by Joe Davis broke big—the Crickets with their version of “You’re Mine.”

Davis’s contract with MGM ran for six months; probably an escape clause allowed him a comfortable exit if he foresaw new success with his own label. Upon its termination on April 14, 1953, MGM retained the rights for further options. By then, however, its sales did not merit such a consideration, allowing Walker and Davis to part on agreeable terms. For the first time MGM was forced to consider its R&B catalogue and Davis certainly provided them with a variety of titles and a few major names like Sammy Taylor and Leslie Uggams. Davis, for his own part, returned to test the new music scene as a main element in his financial affairs.

He wasted no time in commencing recording sessions, effectively in the order listed in the November 1, 1952, issue of *The Billboard* and in the last four days of the month he recorded six different groups. Although Davis clearly enjoyed the return, the speed with which he signed artists is instructive and the excellent session management he employed, literally two weeks after signing with MGM, demonstrates his remarkable professionalism. The first session was with “blues” singer Basil Spears, who happened to be a woman.

Basil Spears, a New York City resident from West 146th Street, recorded four titles at WOR’s Studio B under engineer Bob Doherty, beginning at 2:00 P.M. on October 28. She used the Benny Payne Trio, with Payne on piano, the excellent guitarist Everett Barksdale (whose musicality saved Davis’s 1944 Maxine Sullivan session), and Joe Benjamin (who’d recorded six months earlier in Paris with blues pianist Blind John Davis) on bass. Davis probably knew Payne from his early days of involvement with Fats Waller or perhaps his long stint in the Cab Calloway band with sax man Walter Thomas. His extensive career included the musical, *Blackbirds of 1929*, recording Davis’s “After You’ve Gone” as a piano duet for Victor with Fats Waller in March 1930, singing on a couple of Duke Ellington titles from the same year, and acting as accompanist and musical director to Billy Daniels. Joe Davis certainly reached deep for his session men.

MGM’s publicity machine called Basil Spears (who recorded previously for Manor in 1948 with a small jazz outfit) “a real-for-true blues singer” who put across her “top-notch indigo stylings with . . . stellar support.” Unwisely, the writer stated “we predict a bright future for the girl,” but she appears never to have recorded again. At least she received more than the going rate: those accompanying her received the regular \$41.25 but she earned the odd sum of \$117.50.

The day after the Basil Spears session, Davis returned to the same studio with the same engineer at the same time with his next group, the Eddie Carter Quartette. Once more the group was from Philadelphia, like the 5 Barons, so his local scout—most probably a DJ like Wayne Cody from WIP or songwriter Charles Roisman (“Fine as Wine”)—had been active. Songwriter and pianist Edward H. Carter, living at 4602 Kingsessing Avenue in Philadelphia, worked hard locally. He signed a writer contract with Andrea Music, the publishing house for Philadelphia-based 20th Century label owned by Ivin Ballen. Carter’s group, known as the Carter-Rays, recorded in 1954 for the local Grand label. At the Reco-Art Sound studio on Market Street in Philadelphia they also cut a few very smooth demos sung by the

drummer Harold Cade, while Carter handled the piano, Elvie Hill played guitar, and Percy Joel (a local jazz veteran) was on bass. They sent these demos to Davis to audition with high hopes he would sign the group.

Their opening title was “Eat ‘Em Up,” an up-tempo jive number reminiscent of the 5 Red Caps. Perhaps Davis consciously tried to locate a vocal group to replace them on the MGM roster, but Eddie Carter’s group provided a steppingstone to the Crickets, which did become Davis’s big group. “Don’t Turn Your Back on Me,” very much in the 5 Red Caps’ ballad style on the Reco-Art demo, was beefed up at the session by Davis who coupled them for release about January 9, 1953, in the first batch of new MGM R&B releases. The MGM publicity writer, who never achieved the punch and jargon of *The Billboard’s* writers, described their “debut platter” as a “smoothly done affair spotlighting . . . a mellow ballad . . . and a beautiful novelty, ‘Eat ‘Em Up.’ A very entertaining pair of sides.” Nonetheless, the royalty statement of a year later showed the release sold only 720 discs. On a more cheerful note this version of the tune was used in England as backing to a 2008 television advertisement for a Kellogg’s breakfast cereal.

With his recording pattern now firmly established, Davis was back in the same studio the following day at 2:00 P.M. This time the session went so well that it finished in two hours, allowing him to head straight into a second afternoon session. The afternoon’s first session featured a hitherto unknown female singer, Irene Redfield Davis, backed by an excellent quintet arranged by F. Henri Klickman and Fred Norman. The label dropped the singer’s last name when the record appeared. F. Henri Klickman had been in the music business (and interested in jazz) as long as Davis, having arranged a published orchestration of “The Jelly Roll Blues” in 1915 or 1916. All four titles for the session were written by Irene Higginbotham—once more in her BMI guise of Glenn Gibson—and only “Shakin’ the Blues Away” was recorded previously, by Wingy Manone in 1944.

MGM’s Rhythm and Blues Release sheet No. 1 offered Redfield’s initial coupling for a January 9, 1953, release date. “Irene’s a gal with a great flair for scat singing,” it claimed, clearly trying to sound like *The Billboard*. Lacking that paper’s accuracy, she doesn’t scat on any of the four titles. The writer quite fairly claims that “she makes a strong delivery with the platter building a wild riff-time novelty called ‘Whalin’ Away’ into something with tremendous excitement.” At least the copywriter here kept to the spelling as it was issued. Irene Higginbotham’s copy-written “Wailin’ Away,” a more sensible spelling, benefits from the rock-solid rhythm of Milt Hinton on bass and Panama Francis on drums, which allows plenty of space for



a tough, low-down solo by Taft Jordan on trumpet and another on tenor sax by Samuel Taylor (as Davis names him on his session notes). Bert Keyes, a wonderful name for a pianist, completed the quintet, although his name was typed in late on the AFM return. Despite the fact that Klickman's name is the only one shown on the AFM return, Davis added Fred Norman to his session notes. His careful arrangement of a Duke Ellington-inspired "Never Trouble Trouble" allows Taft Jordan to play open and muted; a thoughtful nod to acknowledge his long stint with the Duke. Even the singer drops into an Ivie Anderson mode. Sam Taylor was renowned as a hard-hitting honker perhaps among R&B fans, just as Norman scored for him on "Shakin' the Blues Away." He was also capable of more gentle work, as on his breathy Ben Websterish solo on the fourth title from the session, "That Cat's Evil." This two-hour session went smoothly; in fact, "Whalin' Away" (*sic*), at least, took only one take.

With no break at all at the end of the session, Davis brought in Gabriel Brown for a remarkable eighth recording stint. According to the AFM return, Davis initially intended bringing Brown into the studio on October 31, the following day, but that slot was filled by a further session. Presumably Gabriel Brown remained close to hand on the thirtieth and was thus able to arrive at the end of the Irene Redfield session, which ended at 6:00 P.M. Following a brief break, Brown once again sat before the microphone. Davis, ever hopeful, allocated four matrix numbers to Brown's session, DA-188 through DA-191, carefully marking in the possibility (no matrix numbers allocated) for as many as four further titles. For whatever reasons, Brown recorded just three titles, presumably still receiving his \$100.00.

As with the 1949 Gabriel Brown session that resulted in a single Decca release on Coral, Davis leased the weakest two titles from this session to MGM. The third title, "Youngster's Blues," remained undiscovered until 1982, to be released the following year on a Flyright album. "Cold Mama" and "I'm Just Crazy" were released on MGM, which proclaimed them "really low-down cotton-patch blues fare," much more in Billboardese. Prompted perhaps by having to write up the Irene Redfield title, "Whalin' Away," next on the release sheet listing, the writer came up with "Gabe's a genuine deep-south blues specialist who also plays a whale of a guitar. 'Top deck' was 'Cold Mama' while the 'flip tune' . . . offers a zany set of lyrics and a catchy vocal trick!" Perhaps Davis wrote this copy.

The October 31 session at WOR at 2:00 P.M., originally slated for Gabriel Brown, documented Millie Bosman, yet another Philadelphian. She, too, had cut demos at Reco-Art in that city, as had Eddie Carter, and sent them



to Davis for approval. They showed her to have a deep, husky voice, similar to that of Billie Holiday. Perhaps her train was late, for Davis's meticulous session notes have altered "2 p.m. to 5 p.m." to read "2 p.m. to 4 p.m. instr. stop," with Bosman slated from "4 to 5." The "instr. stop" was by the Blues Chasers, who, according to the MGM release sheet, "stumbled into recording quite by accident. Hired to back a singer who was scheduled for a session, they were called upon to fill in when the vocalist failed to show in time for the date."

The little band, the same musicians who backed Irene Redfield, simply used the vocal arrangements of two titles for their performances and ad-libbed the solos. "Birmingham Special" and "Old Fashioned Blues" are fine small band instrumentals—rare for the day. The band even liked its ride-out on "Birmingham Special" so much that they incorporated it on the second title they recorded behind Millie Bosman, once she had arrived. "You Ain't Had No Blues," the old Lillian Armstrong tune, which Billie Hayes recorded back in the early 1940s, says much for Millie Bosman's professionalism. Despite her late arrival, it went down in one take. Her other title, "Dream Street," emanated from the fertile mind of Irene Higginbotham. For some reason, Davis's initial choice of the name—Keystone Blues Chasers for the band coupling—was truncated on release.

Five or six sessions in four days was enough, and Davis took a break to reassess the situation, and presumably line up more sessions. He had provided five releases for MGM's January list, among them couplings by Eddie Carter, Basil Spears, Gabriel Brown, and Irene Redfield, on MGM 11405 through 11408, respectively. It seemed a reasonable start.

Perhaps the unscheduled recordings of the Blues Chasers inspired Davis to record another instrumental combo. On November 5 he recorded the Birmingham Boogie Boys, expecting to record four tracks, for which he left matrix gaps from DA-195 through DA-198. However, they recorded only "Boogie Express," which Deryck Sampson had recorded in 1943, and a version of Irene Higginbotham's "Boogie Woogie on a Saturday Nite," which had done well for the 5 Red Caps and subsequently been leased to MGM in 1948. Oddly, these "Boys" were led by female pianist Viola Watkins, who, as a vocalist, had recorded for a number of labels since 1946.

Several of their Superdisc sides also appeared on MGM, so it is all the more surprising that the April 1953 MGM release sheet made no mention of the Birmingham Boogie Boys earlier MGM discs. "Introducing," it said, "an instrumental combo with fire in its make-up. . . . Have fun with this first recording." It was also to be their last. Despite having Jimmy Shirley

on guitar, the group was not strong enough and left no impact on the 1953 popular music market. Indeed, the two remaining matrix numbers, DA-197 and DA-198, which Davis had left open for them, were merely left blank. He used them some three weeks later when he recorded yet another female singer, backed by Eddie Carter's small combo, which started these sessions for MGM.

At least the next singer Davis recorded, Beulah Bryant, enjoyed a long pedigree in the entertainment world. She won an amateur singing contest over KFRC San Francisco and eventually moved to New York about 1945. *The Billboard* in June 1950 mentioned that MGM had just "inked West Coast blues thrush Beulah Bryant to a recording pact," so presumably she had made a name for herself there. At least, at the time of this November 1952 session, she was a resident of Corona, Long Island. The Henri Klickman-Fred Norman combination brought back the same quintet that had done so well behind Irene Redfield and Millie Bosman and added the white trombonist Will Bradley, who had recorded with his own band for Davis in 1943. Oddly, the MGM session sheet shows the pianist to have been Gilbert Stevens rather than Bert Keyes, the original pianist. Davis's session notes actually has Gil Stevens's name written into the band, but has added a note saying "also Bert Keyes." Clearly both men were present and presumably in some way shared the role of pianist at the session.

Once again Davis returned to WOR's Studio B with Bob Doherty at the controls, perhaps he felt more comfortable in this familiar setting. The group recorded four titles, filling the two unallocated matrix numbers initially allocated to Viola Watkins's group, plus two more. The first of these titles "Bed Bug Blues" and the last, "Fat Mama Blues," appeared on an MGM release about February 9, 1953. "Top-drawer Bryant specialties," proclaimed the MGM publicity machine; this time the company didn't indulge in hyperbole. All the titles were written by Irene (Glenn Gibson) Higginbotham and on "Bed Bug Blues," trombonist Will Bradley rips into his solo in the manner reminiscent of her uncle, J. C. Higginbotham. Perhaps fittingly, Bessie Smith's 1927 version of this theme, "Mean Old Bed Bug Blues," had been published by Davis. The up-tempo "Fat Mama Blues" (specially written for Bryant) provides scant solo room for the band and when Taylor does break loose, he seems to have lost impetus. He more than makes up for this on the next title, "He's Got Plenty on the Ball." On the final blues, oddly titled "I'm Just Like the Bear," Bradley and Taft Jordan construct a fine bluesy introduction that showcases Beulah Bryant's voice. Perhaps Ms. Higginbotham could have imagined a better title for

this selection, more like the final track, "Fat Mama Blues," which better described its content.

The MGM publicity machine happily stated that "fans know well the teeming talents of Beulah Bryant, a blues shouter in the grand old tradition—Beulah's past MGM platters have always been good to have and hear. Beulah hasn't been with us in some months, so her latest MGM release is doubly welcome." Perhaps, but it didn't sell. A royalty statement issued in August showed sales of 851. She certainly wasn't to become rich on that, especially as her advance of \$50.00 plus cost of the session musicians—another \$371.25—required recoupment before she received a cent.

Likewise, Millie Bosman's royalty statement of November 1953 showed that 860 copies of her release had been sold. The cost of the session musicians ran to \$288.75, \$82.50 less than the cost of Beulah Bryant's session. For the Bryant session, then, two extra musicians earned \$41.25 each. One was Will Bradley and it proves the presence of both pianists, Bert Keyes and Gil Stevens (presumably both played on the session), as both were paid.

A few days after this session, Davis returned to the studio with another vocal group and this time he struck gold. Davis learned about the Crickets from Cliff Martinez, the former manager of a black vocal group, the Four Alphabets—better known earlier as the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet. Interestingly, he'd actually reissued one of their old Paramount sides in 1945. Proud of the fact that he had "discovered" Slim and Slam, Martinez soon moved other business in Davis's direction.

This five-man group recorded with a piano trio late in November or maybe very early in December 1952. Four titles resulted and the first coupling of "You're Mine" and "Milk and Gin," both written by the tenor vocalist with the group, Harold Johnson, took off, reaching No. 8 in the New York City Regional Rhythm & Blues charts. Their quick success brought them more bookings and MGM rush-released a 45 rpm version for early March 1953, just four weeks after its initial release on 78. The MGM publicity man, billing them as "a vocal quintet with just as cheery a sound as the insect," came closer to *The Billboard* with "the numbers . . . both fit the group like tailor-mades." The other coupling, "For You I Have Eyes" and "I'll Cry No More" (two more Irene Higginbotham tunes), gained release in early June 1953 and MGM's publicity release sheet, confident of further success, smugly commented "we won't wager which number hits the best-seller lists first." Neither recording hit big, but Davis had found the group he wanted and one of the vocalists, Dean Barlow, emerged as a mainstay of his future programs.

Tenor sax-led combos rapidly gained popularity and Jimmy Forrest's "Night Train" became the major hit for 1952, while the saxes of musicians from longtime Ellingtonian Johnny Hodges to Buddy Lucas via Earl Bostic sold discs. Davis's next recording session featured the tenor sax of Al King fronting an excellent quartet led by the highly underrated New Orleans pianist Harry Van Walls. This little band, The Royal Crowns, recorded four sides at WOR on December 4. Fats Waller and Nat "King" Cole's Trio once advertised Royal Crown Cola; presumably Al King obtained some sponsorship, too.

This session didn't go well. "Royal Crown Blues," logically the first title attempted, went down in two takes. "Flyin' with the King" took three, "A King Is Blue" required six takes, while "Big Wind" went down eight times. They did well to complete all four by 5:00 P.M. Once more Davis coupled the first and last titles for Al King's initial MGM release, due about February 9, 1953. "Music to please the ear and delight the feet," claimed the publicity machine, "featuring two top-notch King 'originals.'" They most certainly were his own, and rough lead sheets in Davis's file in King's own hand showed him living nearby in the Bronx.

Perhaps Al King initially came to Davis's notice through one of his Philadelphia contacts, as he had recorded there for the local Melford label—one title was "Royal Flush"—and he'd been a regular at Pittsburgh's Hurricane Club in 1952. His second MGM release didn't come out until June 1953: "two hot instrumentals . . . penned by Al himself . . . tailored to the sound of the band." The MGM copy writer seems to have become stuck in his images and he admitted "to a bit of indigo stuff in 'A King Is Blue.'" His last, rather uninspired line, "nice for dancing as well as listening," lacked punch. The following month Al King and Van Walls again appeared, this time as sidemen on a Lizzie Baker session but after that it was to be just over three years before Davis brought another Al King group into the studio to record, and then for his own label. Davis, as so often found, clearly kept in touch with his musicians.

Davis arranged for two more sessions in December 1952 before he shut down for Christmas. The first, December 8, the Monday after the Al King session, featured four titles by the big-voiced male singer Teddy Williams, backed by a six-piece combo arranged as usual by Fred Norman. The session followed the same format and utilized substantially the same personnel as for the Beulah Bryant session. Gil Stevens returned on piano, George Matthews replaced Will Bradley on trombone, and Kelly Martin provided a more than adequate substitute on drums for

Panama Francis. Taft Jordan, Sammy Taylor, and Milt Hinton completed the group.

Williams's voice is never quite good enough for the band and with so many excellent big-band blues shouters around, he failed to cause any ripples. Nonetheless, "Don't Fool with Me," which had sold well enough for Davis when recorded by the 5 Red Caps, suited Williams's voice and is well scored, with plenty of room to feature George Matthews's trombone. "Bar and Grill Blues," his first MGM release in March 1953, is a solid performance and better than the publicity it received at MGM's hands: "a song with a tune that's gonna get stuck in your whistle and a lyric that'll be buzzing around in your ear for weeks to come." As an afterthought, the writer added, "the accompanying band . . . out-does itself in the background, by the way." Perhaps replacing the writer would have assisted sales because such comments were unlikely to bring the orders pouring in from toughened retailers. Davis must have had to work hard on the road to move these discs.

A week after the Teddy Williams session, Davis cut his final session of 1952, although it seems the titles were never offered to MGM. In fact, until their discovery in 1982, they were never released at all. Not surprisingly, 1952's final session belonged to blues guitarist and Davis favorite Gabriel Brown.

Once more at WOR's Studio B, Davis recorded five titles from Brown on December 15, and they rank among his best. At the time of this recording, Davis already had eight of his unissued titles in stock and one wonders what compelled him to continue to record this intriguing bluesman so often. Perhaps he was spurred on by the fact that country guitar blues such as Lightnin' Hopkins's "Give Me Central 209" and "Coffee Blues" did occasionally reach *The Billboard's* charts in 1952, but something more encouraged the persistent Davis—especially as none of the later releases had sold well. We certainly benefit from Davis's sessions with such an idiosyncratic bluesman and this session marks his last recording effort to break out a Gabriel Brown release. It did not, however, mark his final fling to bring Brown to people's attention, for he was to release two titles from an earlier session on his own label the following year.

In the last week of 1952 Davis signed contracts with two female singers. On Christmas Eve he signed Lizzie Baker, whose one session the following month benefited greatly from the presence of pianist Harry Van Walls, one of the finest Atlantic R&B session men. The other singer signed on New Year's Eve, however, eventually broke big for Davis. She was the nine-year-old Leslie Uggams.

## Chapter Ten

# Jay-Dee Records and Otis Blackwell

Joe Davis interest in the young girl singer, Leslie Uggams, dates at least as early as November 1952, when he signed a contract with her manager. By the end of the year his contract with her stipulated a \$100.00 payment for each group of four recordings plus 1 cent per record sold. She had been something of a star for a year or so, largely because she won an Apollo Amateur Night competition at Harlem's most prestigious venue, where so many black artists broke into the music circuit. Indeed, she was the last child on the show as she was remembered as being "so cute, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, and Dionne Warwick combined couldn't have beaten her in a contest" (Jack Shiffman, *Harlem Heyday* [Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1984], 109). Support for her ability comes from another biographer of the Apollo shows, Ted Fox, citing the view of songwriter Deborah Chessler, who managed a vocal group, The Orioles, who observed that her "voice just filled the theatre. She knew just what to do with her hands, and how to stand and bow and talk. She was eight years old and more professional than a lot of people were at thirty" (*Showtime at the Apollo: The Story of Harlem's World Famous Theater*, rev. ed. [New York: Mill Road Enterprises, 2003], 181).

Leslie Uggams Crayne started out at the age of seven with an act arranged by Lucky Millinder. As it happens, it wasn't Joe Davis who first spotted Leslie Uggams but his wife, Bertha, who noticed the talented youngster after she won an Arthur Godfrey talent show on television. Knowing that her husband was toying with releasing an Easter song about bunnies, she thought the two might link up to record "Easter Bunny Day." Cowriter of "Easter Bunny Day" Joseph Burns, a former special assistant U.S. attorney, later hit the headlines for his part in the prosecution of the Atlantic City political boss, Enoch "Knocky" Johnson.

As usual Davis wasted no time. A week after signing the contract, he returned to the WOR Studios with Leslie and engineer Bob Doherty, for an afternoon session where she cut four novelty children's songs. According to the session sheets, she sang "with Orchestral Accompaniment," actually a five-piece group organized by Fred Norman, who originally wanted veteran Davis session hands like Gil Stevens and Tony Gottusso, but used Frank Signorelli and Alan Hanlon on piano and guitar. Milt Hinton manned the bass (one almost says "of course"), while Shorty Allen hit the vibes and Hank D'Amico played clarinet. They cut "Percy the Pale Faced Polar Bear," "Ev'ry Little Piggy's Got a Curly Tail," "Easter Bunny Day," and "Palsy Walsy Land." This brief session launched MGM and Davis into the kiddy record business.

Leslie created an instant sensation. The *Louisiana Weekly* for February 7, 1953, ran a photograph and headline: "MGM Records Hail Sepia Child Star; Being 'Groomed' For Pics." The article pointed out that "Frank Walker, the man who made Bessie and Mamie Smith . . . has done it again by placing a nine-year old Negro child as an MGM recording artist of kiddy records, under the direct supervision of Joe Davis." The article further stated that she could become a sepia Shirley Temple. "Never before," it quoted Frank Walker as saying, "has any major recording company recorded a Negro child for Kiddy records and it's high time something was done about it." Once again it sounds as if Davis himself wrote the script. In 1953, the *New York Sunday News* for April 5 stated that as the result of the success of "'Easter Bunny Day,' Davis has resurrected several other Burns songs from attic trunks." Pure Davis publicity.

Leslie Uggams worked hard at the start of her significant career leading to the successful "Roots" TV series of the 1980s, which introduced her to an even larger mainstream audience. The daughter of a dancer, whose father sang in the Hall-Johnson choir, and with an aunt who starred in the original stage version of "Porgy and Bess" in New York, she brought a stage pedigree to her career. In the 1990s she appeared in several Broadway shows and in 1997 won an NAACP Image Award nomination for her work on the long-running daytime soap opera, *All My Children*. Late in 2010 she toured extensively in "Uptown Downtown," an autobiography told in music.

Leslie Uggams, however, was not the first artist Davis took into the studios in 1953. Two days earlier he recorded a four-voice female group, the Del Rio Sisters; at least Grace and Gloria Givens appeared to be sisters; Georgia Lee Holston and Shirley Kee may have been. Fred Norman once



more gathered his "reliables" (Taft Jordan, Sammy Taylor, and Milt Hinton) with Conrad Frederick, once pianist with the Golden Gate Quartet, who subbed for Gil Stevens at late notice, and Bobby Donaldson on drums. Davis again tried the Charlie Roisman tune, "Fine as Wine," which he'd tested on the 5 Barons the previous year as well as "Why Should I Cry Over You," a ballad. Neither appears to have been issued and Davis excised a third title, "Judgement Day," from the recording sheet and the session died then. The matrix number for the excised selection was given to Leslie Uggams at her session two days later. A double-sided test underscores that "Fine as Wine" swings well enough, but the ballad side was rather thin, which dimmed MGM's interest in the group.

By spring, Davis (originally asked to bring R&B material to MGM by Frank Walker) was back on task. Early in 1952 he received a letter from a maintenance clerk with the 540th Transport group in Chanchon, Korea. He sent scripts for "Lonely Soldier Blues" and "Better Get Wise with Yourself," a blues in Bb, with "lyrics and music by N. A. Foster, Jr., Army Pfc F-6456." Nat Foster lived on Ramond Street in Atlanta, Georgia, so Davis suggested recording him in his home town at the next opportunity, using the local DJ and facilitator, Zenas Sears.

In 1946 Sears lost his job at WATL for trying to program black music and switched to Atlanta's WGST, where he soon emerged as one of the most influential DJs on the black scene. More than one artist said that if Zenas Sears played it, it was a hit. He'd recorded many local and out-of-town artists for various companies, such as Savoy, using Roy Mays's band behind Billy Wright, for example. Mays's band, in fact, backed Nat Foster late in the evening of January 20, 1953. Trumpet player Mays held a tight band and pianist Julius Wimby (or Wimberley) and guitarist Wesley Jackson accompanied Wright in 1950. Fred E. Taylor, always called Freddy, was on tenor sax, and a rough but tough combo it was. Mays, Jackson, and Taylor accompanied Piano Red in Atlanta on a May 1952 session for RCA Victor.

Four titles were cut, but only two were released. "Lonely Soldier Blues" and "Tall, Tall Woman" went on sale in early March and by the end of 1953 grossed a paltry 181 sales, underscoring why the other two remained unreleased until the 1980s. MGM proclaimed Foster quite fairly as a "blues shouter in the grand tradition with a lusty, strong voice," but perhaps the rougher, southern strains on the Mays band held back sales. Apart from the Crickets, few of these MGM R&B discs sold well. Foster vanished into local obscurity, although he did have an uninteresting soul



release in the 1970s, and Davis decided not to use an out-of-town band on any other sessions.

Next time he came to record, he used perhaps his favorite studio, Studio 16 at WOR, and his favorite engineer, Bob Doherty. A most unusual session it was, too, split between a singer, Lizzie Baker, and a male stand-up comedy/dance duo, Stump and Stumpy (James Cross and Harold Cromer). This time the backing group featured Al King, tenor sax man from the past December session, a rhythm section of Milt Hinton and Panama Francis on bass and drums, and pianist Harry Van Walls. The Lizzie Baker session came to naught despite some beautiful piano playing, and MGM issued nothing at the time. Fortunately, an audio demo of one title, "I Got a Letter," with only Van Walls in accompaniment survived to be issued in 1984. The second title, "It Was So Good," with full combo (although Al King is hardly to be heard), was released in 1988. Both appeared on Krazy Kat albums.

Quite how Stump and Stumpy came into Davis's sights isn't known, but Cromer appeared in the 1948 film, *Boarding House Blues*, along with Una Mae Carlisle, one of his first recording stars, and his lifelong friend from 1920s, vaudeville writer Sidney Easton. Stump and Stumpy also appeared at the Apollo in the week commencing January 20, 1950, in the same show as the Deep River Boys. Irene Higginbotham, Davis's most reliable writer, penned both of the "songs" to be sung by the duo, although they are really stand-up comedy routines set to music. Irene wrote out the words to "Two-Thirds Dead" on some headed notepaper from the Tommy Levene Agency to which Stump had added some more lyrics. But by the time they had come to record, it had changed quite markedly, doubtless due to the spontaneous nature of the performance.

MGM's news desk, seemingly stumped by the need to provide copy for this release, lamely wrote that it is "a number with a knock-out of a lyric." Irene Higginbotham marked "slow with melancholy" on the lead sheet, which the quartet successfully achieves. The publicity department also came up with "cast in a novelty vein . . . neatly touched with an indigo tint," whatever that was meant to convey. Would you have bought it?

A month passed before Davis returned to WOR, this time with another R&B singer/musician, tenor sax man Lem Johnson. In fact, on this session he merely sang, with Sammy Taylor taking over the reedman's role, and stalwart Milt Hinton on bass who worked with ex-Earl Hines drummer Rudy Traylor. Lem Johnson performed on many sessions since his first with the Louis Jordan's leading R&B combo in 1938 and had been a member of Fess Williams's sextet in New York the previous summer. The

session yielded four titles, one of them being the tune Davis had tested out on Lizzie Baker the previous month "I Got a Letter." On his Lem Johnson session notes Davis jotted down "I predict this one to be a big hit." According to the royalty statement issued on November 17, 1953, it sold a mere 689 copies. The other coupling, "Eatin' and Sleepin' Blues" and the long-winded "Never Love Anybody Better Than You Do Yourself," moved only 237 discs. Lem Johnson's \$9.26 total slice stood against the initial musicians' fees (plus a \$50.00 advance to Johnson) of \$256.25. Neither disc became a "big hit" and Johnson received no more than the \$50.00 advance. No one got fat on failed discs, despite the nice plug in *The Billboard* in April that "'I Got A Letter,' has appeal and could get jock action." The flip, "It Takes Money Honey," drew the comment that "the warbler explains that the green stuff is needed to keep the earth rotating on its axis. Routine blues."

Interestingly, on the same day as the Lem Johnson session, Davis wrote to the musical director of WWL in New Orleans:

Dear Pinky,

I like your revision of "Jack The Cat" and if you could possibly do it, I wish you would write a few more choruses, as the more material we have on it the better it will be. I don't know when I am doing another date with Leslie Crayne, but whenever I do, I am quite sure "Jack The Cat" will be one of the tunes.

I am enclosing contracts herewith and I just put in your last name—you fill in your correct first two names—so it will be right. You will notice I am splitting up the royalty so you get  $\frac{3}{4}$  and Ken Elliott  $\frac{1}{4}$  which gives you a pretty good share and at the same time gives us some good will with Ken.

My MGM record by The Crickets of "You're Mine" is stepping out and looks very big, so I will appreciate any help you can give me on it in New Orleans. Under separate cover, I am sending you a half dozen records, although I am pretty sure I mailed records to every disk jockey in town.

I am enclosing herewith a couple of copies of the song and if you can put it on the show for me, it will help too as every bit counts right now while the song is breaking.

This letter not only provides a capsule view of the back-stage mechanics behind helping a song to break but also an insight into the permanent

juggling act which was Davis's life. In a few sentences Davis promotes his Crickets hit, looks forward to tunes he might well record in the future with a child singer, and maintains good business contacts with the musical director of a radio station a thousand miles away. Please note the neat way that Davis left the musical director to complete his own names on the contract. He may well not have known his first given name was Irvine but he, like the New Orleans jazz fan, would know him as one of the finest exponents in the city on jazz clarinet, Pinky Vidacovich.

The following week opened with a recording session, again at WOR, on the Monday afternoon with yet another R&B female singer, Paula Watson, who achieved considerable success in 1949 with the short-lived West Coast independent, Supreme. Fred Norman once again assembled the core of the little band that also backed Lem Johnson: Sammy Taylor on tenor sax, Milt Hinton on bass, and Rudy Traylor on drums. Adding Don Abney on piano, he also augmented the front line to three reeds, using the baritone sax of Dave McRae and an unnamed alto player. Just who Norman had in mind is not recorded, but the Local 802 contract sheet was left blank until the third sax man's name—T. Alexander Hulbert—was later typed in. T. Alexander Hulbert may well have been a totally unknown sub but he played well enough in the neat little arrangements set out by Norman, filling out the sound extremely well. Even with the 1930s Claude Hopkins band Norman earned a reputation for his unassuming but gently blending arrangements.

The material was not of a high quality to start with but Norman did his best. Irene Higginbotham, as Glenn Gibson, wrote the session opener, a rather limp tune called "Put a Little Bug in My Ear." The session also included the undistinguished "Tennessee Walk" but at least the fast-paced "I Love to Ride," which also benefited from expressive lyrics, provides enough room for a typically tough tenor solo from Sam Taylor and a good solo on Eb alto. When MGM released "Put a Little Bug in My Ear" and "I Love to Ride," early the following month, the uninspired and apparently distracted MGM publicity section wrote "how do you like your songs? Sweet? Hot? With a twinkle in the approach? Paula's master of each."

Never good at its job—at least when trying to sell Davis's recordings—the publicity section prefaced this dreary plug with "introducing PAULA WATSON, a vocalist who's new to records." No one, apparently, informed their publicity machine that she charted a few minor hits in 1949. The other coupling understandably posed them further problems. Never at a complete loss, they came up with "a rhythmic cutiey that's gonna get stuck in

your whistle," for "Tennessee Walk." This "rhythmic cutey" sold 393 copies by November 1953, but at least the first coupling reached the 1,756 mark. All in all, Watson's work fell way short of being *Cashbox's* "Race Disk of the Week," as had been one of her Supreme couplings in February 1949. Nonetheless, *The Billboard* for April 11 thought "I Love To Ride" could be a real coin-grabber." To push it, Davis sent out 1,000 toy plastic racing cars.

Perhaps the Crickets' success prompted Davis to bring another vocal group into the studio late in March 1953. The Blenders debuted at the Apollo Theater in November 1949 and then recorded extensively for Decca, but when that company terminated the group's contract, their manager approached Joe Davis. They recorded and then quickly released four titles during the summer. For several years guitarist Napoleon "Snags" Allen played in the group with leader Ollie Jones, but the guitarist in the accompanying trio on the record date was Everett Barksdale. Milt Hinton, as usual, was on bass, while Gil Stevens made the date on piano.

Once again the publicity machine fumbled in the dark in their vain effort to create a buzz, while providing factually accurate information. Despite nine couplings released on Decca—to say nothing of an earlier release in 1949 on National—MGM introduced them "as a vocal group new to records . . . one which will surely establish itself quickly as one of the finest around." Davis at least thought so and when he eventually split away from MGM to return again to the record manufacturing world, he took a second Blenders session with him, which took place in mid-April 1953 with the same group members and accompanists, with the exception that John Collins was on guitar. The third title recorded, "Don't Play Around with Love," achieved a degree of notoriety as on one take they were reportedly instructed to sing "Don't fuck around with love," in order to produce some under-the-counter copies for DJs.

In 1971 Davis eventually released "Don't? (!)?(!) Around with Love," on a 250-run on the Kelway label and two years later ran up some single-sided pressings as a "collector item." He seldom missed a trick. It is easy enough to write that group singers such as these weren't paid royalties, but for the MGM session, three of the Blenders received \$60.00 each while James De Loathe received \$80.00. Sales of their first coupling had reached 5101 by November 1953 but only 505 of the second release.

Nonetheless, Davis quickly noticed the changing sales patterns. A week after the second Blenders session he again recorded the Crickets and a month later, on May 28, recorded yet another session with them. By the second Crickets session he already had four titles each by the Blenders and

the Crickets that he had not leased to MGM. Perhaps by the time of these sessions Davis was already sensing that the R&B scene was shifting. By the time of the May Crickets session he had other plans afoot.

*The Billboard* for June 13, 1953, carried a note dated the previous week headed *Davis to Quit M-G-M For Own R&B Label*. It pointed out that Davis “will sever his relations with the diskery in July, and . . . the new label will be called Jay-Dee, and will feature those artists who have been waxing under Davis for the M-G-M R & B line.” The article further described that “You’re Mine” by the Crickets sold 50,000 copies and that “For You I Have Eyes” seemed poised for an increase in popularity. Davis needed to go on his own again and his next step consisted of taking with him a string of ex-MGM R&B artists who, according to the paper, were “under a waxing pact with him.” The list included artists whom he patently did not want, such as Paula Watson, Beulah Bryant, Teddy Williams, and Nat Foster. It also included—indeed commenced with—the Crickets and the Blenders, going on to mention Gabriel Brown and, intriguingly, Tommy Brown, which is most probably a misprint.

Davis clearly left on good terms for *The Billboard* reported that “Jay-Dee Records will be pressed by the M-G-M pressing plant from July,” the date of the first release, “and will be nationally distributed.” *The Billboard* also observed perceptively that MGM now had “a few r&b artists pacted, including Ivory Joe Hunter, but its r&b releases, outside of the Davis etchings, have been sparse.” The article also pointed out that “all masters cut for [Davis] by [MGM] will revert to him if they are not released by the diskery by a certain time. M-G-M is expected to release one more group of r&b platters cut by Davis in July.” This was the last Blenders MGM release. “Davis will start out on his own about July 15,” it further reported, “and is expected to release his first wax in August.” Davis, in typical fashion, released it only a couple of days after the July 15 date with this *Billboard* article on one side of a press release sheet. He posted out the flier with his publishing logo and a copy of his first Jay-Dee release, 777 by the Crickets, beside the address space on the front. Davis was back in the record business with his fingers crossed. He’d chosen a lucky 777 to kick off his new project and although the side he’d chosen to represent on the flier was “When I Met You,” perhaps he subconsciously decided to couple it with “Dreams and Wishes” rather than one of the other unreleased titles.

His success with the Crickets and the Blenders prompted Davis to plunge once again into the record producer’s scene, though he’d been canny enough to keep his name before his public, or at least those knowledgeable

about the music scene. As the Crickets remained hot with their earlier MGM release, Davis understandably used them to commence his new Jay-Dee label. He then reached way back into the deep bag of unissued material to issue—most surprisingly—“Jump Town” and “Feeling Sentimental” (Jay-Dee 778) by Fred Norman’s stellar band from September 1952 and a Gabriel Brown coupling from August 1949, the session mates to the poor-selling Coral coupling: “Hold Me Baby” and “Nobody Loves Like My Little Girl.” Although copies of the Brown disc were found among Davis’s effects, its existence had not been previously known and most probably it never saw official release. Perhaps, finally, Davis realized that it simply was not a saleable product.

Jay-Dee 780 was one of the Blenders couplings from his MGM days, including “Don’t Play Around with Love.” Logically, the next release, Jay-Dee 781, was another Crickets coupling, this time from their May 1953 session. One title, “Fine as Wine,” finally found release and to the rhythm trio that backed them on both sessions—Gil Stevens on piano, Milt Hinton on bass, and Tony Gottuso on guitar (it had been Alan Hanlon in April)—Davis added Sam Taylor on tenor sax to beef up the sound. This clearly appealed to Davis for when the group recorded again later in the year, Sam Taylor once again blew up-front of a rhythm section.

Joe Davis focused on setting up his distribution and marketing network and didn’t return to the studio to record until September. The first of these sessions was aimed at the Christmas market rather than the vocal group. Although he failed to take Leslie Uggams’s contract with him to Jay-Dee, Davis nonetheless decided to try to make a hit with another nine-year-old girl, Irene Treadwell. She cut two titles with the Phil Ellis Choir and in a flier to radio stations dated October 15, 1953, Davis pointed out: “A few years ago I published ‘Daddy’s Little Girl’ and I feel confident that ‘Dear Santa, Bring Back My Daddy To Me’ will be added to my honor roll of song hits that I have published in the past.” Despite Davis’s mailing of over 250 three-minute exploitation films, containing music and drawings, to TV stations, Irene Treadwell, possibly the daughter of George Treadwell, who played trumpet in the 1946 band of Kirby Walker, returned to utter obscurity.

Even with still unreleased vocal group sides by the Crickets and the Blenders, Davis decided to spread his net to include yet another, similar group. The Sparrows, led by Joseph “Rocky” Washington, all hailed from the same small section of New York City and were even well enough organized to have the names of two substitute singers written into the contract. Neither Leo Buller nor Eugene Merriday actually sang at either session, so

this may have been a ploy by Davis. The group recorded four selections at Audio-Video's studio backed by a trio led by Gil Stevens on piano. Perhaps they had day jobs as the session began at 8:00 P.M. Their two titles on Jay-Dee 783, "Tell Me, Baby" and "Why Did You Leave Me?" followed a typical formula: a ballad backing an up-tempo number.

The following month Davis brought them back to the same studio and engineer, for an 8:30 P.M. start, to cut four more titles. In fact, he appeared to be searching for a more up-tempo track to back one of the remaining ballads cut at the first session. The session's first title, "Hey!" fulfilled this need and the others provided little more than a bonus for him. "Come Back to Me" appeared on the flip side of the remaining title from the first session, "Love Me Tender," on a release three years hence. "I'm Gonna Do That Woman In" finally saw release only in 1971 as the flip of the controversial Blenders' "Don't Fuck About with Love."

New session pianist Al Williams brought a tough, driving, bluesy sound to the track and his magnificent piano playing on the final track from the session, "I'm Gonna Hold My Baby Tight," possibly prevented its release at the time. In fact, "I'm Gonna Hold My Baby Tight" didn't reach the public until 1985. Williams's powerful blues playing comes as something of a surprise, as he had recorded in mid-1952 in the company of jazz legends Sonny Stitt, Charlie Mingus, and Kai Winding. It was rough justice that, just as the group was punching out some tough, raunchy vocal R&B, the Sparrows faded from the scene but in 1953 their records simply didn't sell well enough.

Before this final Sparrows session, however, Davis happened upon a recording artist and writer—Otis Blackwell—possibly the best-known black songwriter in the R&B/rock-and-roll scene. His first session for RCA occurred late in 1952, but these records didn't sell particularly well for such a major label. Blackwell, another Apollo show winner, met Joe Davis by way of booking agent Cliff Martinez, who had brought him the Crickets. Impressed by his talent Davis added Otis Blackwell to his stable of writers and singers in September 1952, though he didn't record him until one year later.

Blackwell received \$125.00 for each session of four titles (a relatively high rate for the time) plus one cent for each record sold plus any writer royalties for his own works. On September 22, 1953, Davis finally took him into Audio-Video's studio at 730 5th Avenue to cut four titles under the watch of engineer Harry Weiss. Davis assembled a tidy little band with a rhythm section well used to Davis sessions: pianist Frank Signorelli, Tony Gottuso, Frank Carroll (the last two were on the Sparrows's final session),



and drummer Panama Francis. For the first, but not the last, time he used tenor sax man Al Sears. The first two titles recorded became Jay-Dee 784; "Tears, Tears, Tears" and "Daddy Rollin' Stone." The latter took off, emerged as a seminal R&B song, and enjoyed a revival by The Who in 1965.

Once the first Otis Blackwell Jay-Dee issue took off, Davis brought him back into the studio before the end of the year. Although he still had two titles unissued, Davis recorded four more sides on December 30, with a five-piece band, including two saxes as well as jazz veterans Arvell Shaw on bass and Cozy Cole on drums. In a wry slip when writing out the musicians' names, Davis had initially written down Lem Fowler (his pianist contact of the 1920s) instead of tenor player Lem Johnson. In the top right-hand corner, where he usually wrote down the engineer's name, he had written Irving Kaufman. Was this yet another subconscious harkening back to the 1920s or was he indeed the engineer? One of the titles recorded, "I'm Travelin' On," didn't appear until a Davis long-playing album release in 1957. By that date a new wrinkle complicated the Davis-Blackwell relationship, which unfortunately had to be resolved in court.

Between the two Otis Blackwell dates Davis added a session on December 9 for a group listed as the Crickets, who were issued on the two discs following the release of Otis Blackwell's iconic "Daddy Rollin' Stone." However, these Crickets differed vastly from the original Crickets who cut for MGM with only Dean Barlow, the lead singer, present in the new group, although tenor singer William Lindsay occasionally practiced with the original group.

Perhaps inspired by the success of Otis Blackwell, Davis asked Grover "Dean" Barlow to appear as a solo singer and removed him from the Crickets. Former Cricket Harold Johnson eventually recorded for Davis with the Mellows, but the remaining three members never recorded again. The four songs recorded by this second Crickets were arranged by one David K. Plange and performed by a five-piece band that foreshadowed the second Otis Blackwell session: Arvell Shaw on bass and drummer Cozy Cole joined the excellent and inventive Al Williams on piano, while guitarist Mundell Lowe played guitar, and the ever-reliable Sam Taylor performed on tenor sax.

A letter to Davis from S. F. Moss, president of Mutually Owned Society for Songwriters, Inc., dated November 16, 1953, marks an odd footnote to the session: "I am enclosing our check for \$750.00 (Seven hundred and fifty dollars). This amount is payment in full as per our agreement as contained in your letter of November 5th 1953 i.e., that you will make the recording



of 'My Baby's Little Shoes' with either The Crickets or The Blenders and will ship 1,000 finished (78 RPM) records to us between the 15th and 20th of January 1954." Clearly, the importance of songwriting influenced the choice of songs performed at sessions as well as those released.

The year 1953 ended most satisfactorily for Davis. Most notably he terminated his contract with MGM and once again set up on his own. His internal list of recordings made from 1953 to December 1956 shows that in 1953 he released nine discs: Jay-Dee 777 through Jay-Dee 785 or possibly Jay-Dee 786—with Gabriel Brown's Jay-Dee 779 seemingly unissued. On the same list Davis noted the number of sides recorded by various artists: Phil Ellis 2; The Crickets 7; Dean Barlow 4; The Blenders 4; The Sparrows 8; and Otis Blackwell 8.

Davis's files contain an October 1953 letter from Andy Razaf (now living in Los Angeles):

Your letter was like a tonic and arrived at a time when I needed a word of cheer . . . I treasure your friendship. Yes, I know the appalling condition of the music biz today. The most important outlet, for both publisher and writer, has narrowed down to the disk jockey and A & R men. These confused and peculiar thinking gentlemen now decide what the public should hear, what writers should write and publishers publish. A most dangerous state of affairs and detrimental to the growth and development of creative genius and, by no means, conclusive to better musical taste . . .

I'm mighty happy to hear you are going "all-out" in your recording venture. "Jay-Dee" can't miss, with you at the helm. Too bad, you can't pass some of your knowledge and experience, on to some of the "so-called" brains that hold key-positions in all phases of the music biz!!! You will, no doubt, recall that years ago, I told you that you should sign up and handle the Negro talent that flocked to your office. Glad to see that you—at last—are doing this!

I remember how you helped the Red Caps, Savannah Churchill and many others. How many have remembered?

It is entirely understandable that Davis retained a letter from an old friend that ended "with my fond regards to all the family and wishing you the best of luck, I am always sincerely, Andy." Razaf's words doubtless echoed some sentiments about the music scene Davis, too, felt. Perhaps these sentiments proved partially responsible for the changes in direction

that his career took from time to time. If anyone in the music business showed himself capable of bending with the wind without breaking, it was Joe Davis.

### Smoke from Your Cigarette

Davis underscored his resettlement into the record business with an informal listing in January 1954 of his wife, Bertha's, noms de plume. She used Bert Kapp (her "real" name) and Rinky Scott Jones, among a few others. Joe Davis augmented these during his days with MGM in 1952–1953 with transfers from his own name to Bert Kapp or Bert Davis. In 1954 he also transferred Phoebe Snow, Billy Collins, and Glenn Gibson—though this was originally a pseudonym for Irene Higginbotham—to his wife.

Davis's first session of the new year brought the new Crickets, still comprising Dean Barlow's quartet with Joseph Dias, Robert Bynum, and William Lindsay, back into the studio. For some reason he chose a trio accompaniment, though still using Mundell Lowe on guitar and Arvell Shaw on bass, to whom he added Conrad Frederick on piano. The session yielded only two titles: "Are You Looking for a Sweetheart" and "Never Give Up Hope," released on Jay-Dee 789.

By the time of his royalty period in September 1954, Davis worked out the royalties due to Dean Barlow:

Sales of Jay-Dee 785	17,616
Sales of Jay-Dee 786	2,364
Sales of Jay-Dee 789	6,623

with a total due of \$452.25, to be offset, of course, against session fees of almost \$800.00. As Jay-Dee 785 was only released nine months before, sales had been reasonable.

Whether or not Andy Razaf's letter of the past October nudged Davis to release some of the older, "better" songs of his earlier days in the business, his next Jay-Dee release was by the Deep River Boys—"No One Else Will Do" and their cover of the Bon Bon hit, "Truthfully," cut in 1951. Davis eventually used the remaining two matrix numbers initially allocated to the Crickets for an obscure reissue, as Jay-Dee 889, which commenced a series of two releases! Again it was a 1951 reissue coupling, by singer Betty Madigan, of "Blue Fog" and "Everyone Needs Someone." Eventually,

together with “Investigatin’ Papa” and “Let That Be a Lesson to You,” all four titles appeared on an extended-play disc, Jay-Dee 210.

For the January Crickets session, Davis used the Mastertone Studios at 709 8th Avenue and he again booked the studio on February 26 for the Eddie Lisbona trio. The pianist’s accompanists included drummer Cozy Cole; perhaps dealing with such jazzmen as Arvell Shaw and Cozy Cole stirred Davis’s memories of earlier days when he was recording jazz. Whatever it was that gave rise to it, in March he recorded a session at Mastertone by an excellent Dixieland jazz sextet led by trumpeter Lee Castaldo. As Lee Castle, he had been in the brass sections of numerous popular big bands, including those of Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Jack Teagarden, and Will Bradley, and left Benny Goodman in 1943 to form his own fourteen-piece band. As Lee Castle’s Jazztette, he signed a March 15 contract to record four titles and exactly one week later the three-hour session began at 9:00 P.M. It proved to be a wise move as the session ran nicely until midnight.

Lee Castle gathered Peanuts Hucko (clarinet), Lou McGarity on trombone, bassist Bob Haggart, and the versatile Dick Cary on piano around him. This fine combo was rounded out by drummer George Wettling, yet another veteran of earlier jazz sessions at a Davis studio, who took over from the originally slated Cliff Leeman. The French horn is heard on these recordings, which Davis noted in his session log beside their version of “Stars and Stripes Forever.” Keen-eared collectors can determine whether or not multi-instrumentalist Cary (who played alto horn as well as piano) was capable of playing French horn at the time. Davis naturally noted down this unusual jazz band instrument, as he had played one himself in the navy band in 1917!

According to DJ Lee Kamman, who wrote the notes to an extended-play 45 rpm release, the session featured “variety and pace with taste. There is ‘Alabama Blues’ for a pastel feeling. ‘Stars And Stripes Forever,’ a new theme for a Dixieland march. An old timer ‘On The Banks Of The Wabash’ received the full blues treatment. ‘Trombone Jitters,’ a minstrel melody, has fresh new sounds.” The writer also gave capsule biographies and for contractual reasons, Haggart’s entry reads: “? ? ? Bass. Born in New York City . . . Member of the famous Bob Crosby Band. *Downbeat* and *Metro-nome* poll winner. Composer of many songs including ‘What’s New.’” No one was trying too hard to allow him to remain anonymous.

At this time Davis tried breaking into the slowly emerging EP market with four-track, 45 rpm discs in hard jackets. Jay-Dee E-P “Album” 202, as

it was called, earned the title "Jump Town" and was released as by the Jump Town Orchestra. On a single release Davis dubbed the group, Fred Norman and his Orchestra. This March 1954 Lee Castle session became E-P "Album" 203. Davis even commenced a new jazz series on 45 rpm disc and Jay-Dee 666 held "Stars and Stripes For Ever" and "Alabama Blues," written by Rinky Scott Jones, which also appears to be the final jazz release in the series.

Davis appeared to switch direction quite readily in this quickly changing marketplace. In April he heard from a Cleveland radio advertising agent, Bill Hawkins, about a black gospel group, the Five Angels of Harmony, of whom Hawkins wrote that "they have a lot on the ball, and should be just the group you are looking for." Davis showed no immediate interest either in this group or in releasing gospel records. He recorded six titles from an excellent black gospel group in May 1954, but released only one coupling, on a new series, as Jay-Dee 1100 ("Get Right with God" / "I Prayed, I Prayed"), a powerful male quartet with guitar, bass, and drums that deserved a better release name than "God's Children." Ulysses Smith, who remained active in the music business until the 1970s, earned the writing credits on both selections, but the identity of the group remains unknown. Hardly surprisingly, Jay-Dee 1100 remained Davis's only black gospel release from the 1950s.

Of as much interest in the letter from Bill Hawkins to Davis about the gospel group were his other comments: "While writing this note your record's arrived. I am very grateful to you for 'On That Power Line.' I will work with it. The photographer gave me two pictures and said he had sent you two. I really enjoyed having you stop in to talk shop with me. Some day I am hoping I'll be in a position to compensate you for the very fine favor you have done for me."

The precise nature of the "favor" related to "On That Power Line," written by Otis Blackwell, remains unclear. Nonetheless, Bill Hawkins's grateful tone shows that, once again, Davis took time from hawking (sorry) his product to "talk shop" with Cleveland's first black radio DJ, who began broadcasting in 1948. As well as any man Davis understood the value of personal relationships and that seeds sown many years previously could well pay off later. The following is a poem "written especially for Miss Flora Johnson by Joe Davis," resulting from a letter asking for Otis Blackwell's photograph and permission to start a fan club for him:

I received your letter for which thanks I'll say,  
The pictures you asked for are on the way;

Otis Blackwell is one of my stars you see,  
So, boost him along and it will be for me;  
His latest record "Nobody Met The Train,"  
Is really "gone" and that's very plain,  
So, start a fan club for Otis my dear,  
And you will receive thanks from everyone here.  
As for my picture, when you see it, you'll thank Heaven,  
A young chick like you don't want one from a man, fifty-seven;  
So thanks again for your trouble, your spirit is swell,  
Keep listening to Dave Dixon, and Station KBTL.

Instead of a signed photograph, plus a perfunctory note stating that Miss Johnson was welcome to start a fan club, Davis took the time to create something special.

Otis Blackwell's "Nobody Met the Train," to which Davis alluded in his poem to Miss Johnson, was recorded in May 1954, at the second of two Blackwell sessions held that month. Oddly, the first session contained only three titles; the last space on the recording sheet remained blank and it doesn't look as if a fourth title was even contemplated. The issued versions of the other three only ran to the second take of each, so they must have rehearsed them very thoroughly. The rhythm section combined many of Davis's regulars: pianist Con Frederick, bass player Frank Carroll, and Panama Francis on drums. Once more the band featured a two-sax front line; Lem Johnson remained on tenor, but this time Billy Graham's baritone sax had given way to that of Dave McRae.

Two weeks later Otis Blackwell returned to Mastertone Studio, again late in the evening, for a split session and recorded only two titles. Typically, the idiosyncratic Joe Davis released this coupling—"Nobody Met the Train" and "I'm Standing at the Doorway to Your Heart"—before any from the previous session. The slimmed-down group included Lem Johnson on sax and, oddly, guitarist Tony Gottuso replaced the drummer, making one of the few Davis sessions without a drummer.

Two titles sung by Jimmy Saunders with the rhythm trio took up the balance of this May 26, 1954, session. Davis meticulously noted that of the four men used for the Blackwell session, only three were used for the second, which ran from 10:00 P.M. to 11:55 P.M.; some five minutes short of overtime. The two titles, earlier Davis hits "Daddy's Little Girl" and "Daddy's Little Boy," suggest that Davis had taken heart from Andy Razaf's letter in returning to older, "better" tunes. Sensibly he kept the Jimmy Saunders

coupling outside his main Jay-Dee series and gave it the release number 890, the number following the most recent Betty Madigan release.

By now Davis had issued—or planned the release of—six Otis Blackwell discs. On June 17 he took Blackwell back into the studio to cut “Oh! What a Babe,” “Here I Am,” “O-O-O Oh!,” and “I Face This World All Alone.” They were not to be issued on Jay-Dee, however, and a contract signed with RCA on August 17 increased the royalty payment to the publisher, “Beacon Music Co. Joe Davis owner,” to one and a half cents a side. Though not Blackwell’s final session for Davis, before too long they engaged in bitter litigation.

While Davis contemplated an RCA session with Otis Blackwell in June, he also planned to augment his own label’s vocal group holding the following month. On July 12 he signed a contract with the four members of the Mellows, led by ex-original Crickets singer Harold Johnson. This Bronx-based group featured the distinctive voice of the seventeen-year-old female lead singer, Lillian Leach. Davis carefully picked the excellent session pairing of Sam Taylor on tenor sax and guitar wizard Mickey Baker, with Milt Hinton on bass. “Pretty Baby, What’s Your Name?” a storming R&B number with Taylor at his best and Baker chop-chording in his inimitable style, highlights Lillian Leach’s soprano vocal. The last title from the session really did her credit. Just how the band descended from the high of “Pretty Baby” marks its utter professionalism, for “Smoke from Your Cigarette” lands as a gentle ballad, with Lillian’s little girl voice carrying the whole song in front of Sam Taylor’s breathy, Ben Websterish sax. Due to commence at 7:00 P.M., the session started two hours and fifteen minutes later, but once again Davis closed it down before midnight, ending at 11:30.

The Mellows’s first Jay-Dee release, “How Sentimental Can I Get” and “Nothin’ to Do,” sold poorly but, undaunted, Davis released the remaining two titles. “Smoke from Your Cigarette” placed tenth in *Cashbox’s* New York regional R&B charts early in 1955, helped by Alan Freed’s airplay over WINS. The Mellows came back into a studio for Davis in 1955 and, as late as 1961, “Smoke from Your Cigarette” was considered good enough to be issued on the obscure Sabrina label out of Grand Falls, North Dakota, by Amcan Record Corp. Obscure, indeed, but the record sold 65,000 copies by midsummer of that year.

Apart from another Lee Castle session in the autumn, Davis recorded no further sessions in 1954. He had plenty of music ready for issue, to say nothing of an enormous back-catalogue, should he see fit to dip into it. His next issues by Otis Blackwell, the Crickets, and the Mellows utilized older

material and they fit alongside Jay-Dee 796 by Steve Gibson, ex-leader of his 5 Red Caps. To capitalize on Gibson's popularity Davis released a decade-old "Ouch!" and "It Hurts Me But I Like It" (originally released as by the Magnolia Five); typically, perhaps, each was initially backed by a different coupling. Unable to use the 5 Red Caps name, Davis came as close as he could, releasing the disc as Steve Gibson and The Red Caps. These records appear in Davis recording sequence directly before the Lee Castle session in October, replete with new matrix numbers.

Davis remained quite busy, despite his absence from the recording studio. Two letters just a month apart in the summer of 1954, both from old acquaintances from the 1930s, demonstrate his persistent, varied efforts to promote his music and his artists. Late in June he received a friendly letter from the Deep River Boys' manager Ed Kirkeby, then in Stockholm: "The Deeps are a big success here, and this is our third season with a stay at the famous Tivoli for six weeks, the longest European engagement we have had . . . All in all we will play three full months in Scandinavia and then get on to London to six weeks of Moss Empire Theaters there. They want us to go to Australia following and the offer is so good I think I'll take it."

However, the letter was more than just touring chitchat. Kirkeby stated that they had "recorded your 'Sleepy Little Cowboy' for H.M.V. here last week, and they will need the data on writers, copyright and publisher before they can issue it. . . . As cowboy songs are very popular over here, we will use the song in the act as much as possible and I am hoping to be able to use the film in our presentation. It would be a good novelty, and should create a demand for sheet music. If you have a publisher contact here, I suggest that you get them to issue the song here or at least be your sales representative." Kirkeby offered the name of a local major publisher, in case Davis lacked representation, writing, "if you wish you could write to [Mr. Reuterschiold] and mention my name."

Here's yet another example of why Davis maintained contact with his musical associates. Kirkeby helped Davis by first recording his Deep River Boys hit of April 1952, then keeping it (of all the possible cowboy songs available to him) in the group's repertoire, and then helping to promote the sheet music. The multilayered approach to marketing, including sheet music, certainly appealed to Davis and his widespread business interests. As of 2011, the three-minute film made to exploit "Sleepy Little Cowboy" has yet to surface despite the fact that it seems to have gained some distribution not only within the United States to TV stations, but also to Sweden.

A month later Davis received a letter from Reginald Foresythe, the avant-garde composer of the 1930s then living in Sussex Gardens, in London's West End, with whom Davis had done business. Foresythe ended by saying that "if there is anything that I can do for you here, please do not hesitate to ask." Perhaps Davis hoped he might be able to promote a song but it's instructive that "even after all this time," in Foresythe's words, he volunteered to help out his old business colleague.

On October 21, 1954, Davis took Lee Castle's Dixieland jazz band back into Mastertone Studio for an afternoon session, cutting four titles. The same six-piece combo from March sat down and recorded an Irene Higginbotham tune, "Birmingham Special," which had been cut in 1952 by the Blues Chasers followed with a Lee Castle arrangement of the "trad" warhorse, "When the Saints Go Marching In." The next title—the best of the bunch—shared a coauthorship among Castle, Virginia Canyon, and pianist Dick Cary. Initially titled "Virginia's Blues," the title was partly erased on Davis's recording sheet, and the new title, "Mood in Blue," inserted. It ran to almost four and one-half minutes and when Davis released Volume 2 of Lee Castle's Jazztette on an extended play 45 rpm disc, he used "Mood in Blue" alone on one side. It is a most evocative and moody blues, with a beautiful solo from Peanuts Hucko on clarinet and ethereal whistling from the uncredited Bob Haggart. All in all, "Mood in Blue" at least gives a hint of this haunting tune. "Dixieland Mambo," meant to cash in on the Latin dance craze, completed the session.

Just as Davis revisited Dixieland jazz, he heard from an old colleague from his early days of recording jazz, trumpeter Wingy Manone, then resident in Las Vegas. He wrote on the colored, headed notepaper of the Desert Inn (although he enclosed it in the envelope of another major hotel):

Dear Joe,

Long time no see but always thinking of the good old days, joe i want to find walter bishop the colored song writer. him and i have a song called "Cool Off, Cool Off" this would be a great song for your Publishing Co. . . . if you like it maybe we can do business, in the meantime find the man. I have another great tune for him to write Lyrics to.

Presumably nothing came of this particular contact.

Three days later Davis received a letter from Joe Quinn of United Broadcasting, which covered some seven radio stations, mostly in the Washington, D.C., area, although others stretched from Richmond, Virginia, to Cleveland,



Ohio. Davis had obviously been plugging a recent release and Quinn was doing his best to fit the disc into his schedule. Quinn explained that

I have tried to conform to your suggestion as outlined in your letter to me. One thing that “goofs” on that SKed [*sic*] is the fact that 1 to 2 P.M. is the Afternoon Spirituals Program, and of course we can’t include your current “biscuit” on there.

Consequently, with a little maneuvering of my own, your present sked [*sic*] is as follows:

1. - between 9 & 10 AM
2. - “ 12 & 1PM
3. - “ 3 & 4PM
4. - 4 & 5PM
5. - 7 & 8 PM

I hope this will meet with your approval, and I assure you that when I log these plays, I specify that it’s to be BEACON REC - BE FAITHFUL, so that the jockey can make no mistake as to what record we want played at that time.

Joe Quinn could hardly have been more cooperative, although “Be Faithful” sounds as if it might just squeeze into an afternoon spirituals session! Beacon 555 coupling “Be Faithful” with “I’m Not the One You Love,” by Dean Barlow with the Crickets and came out when Davis was just over halfway through his Jay-Dee release program and about one year from commencing his next label, once again named Davis. “I’m Not the One You Love,” even more confusingly, also appeared on Jay-Dee 781 late in 1953. Discographers trying to sort out Davis’s various labels and releases might think that he held some grievance against them.

The year ended on a sour note with a letter from Joe Davis to Harold Johnson of the Mellows suggesting that Johnson had been trying to obtain a recording contract for the group in contravention of Davis’s contract: “I understand that you are offering your services, together with the group to other recording labels and I think that in view of the fact that I have been so nice to you that this is very unfair. Of course, you understand that you have a binding contract with me and I will do everything within my power to protect my interest and rights. Before you attempt to get into any difficulties, you should bear in mind what happened with original ‘The Crickets’—as I will go the limit to stop any company from releasing any

records—should you record for them and that goes for all members of The Mellows, also.”

Davis sent this by registered mail, number 528662, but Johnson was probably wise enough at the time not to take receipt of it, for it remained, unopened, among Davis’s effects. Johnson, however, must have been aware somehow of the contents for nothing further disagreeable happened. Perhaps calling in his dues, the group recorded again before the end of January 1955. Significantly, Davis’s letter to Johnson hinted, and no more, that a similar event precipitated the disbanding of the original Crickets.

### Fish Bait

The year 1955 proved the high point of Davis’s new record release schedule. His nine releases of 1953 rose to fourteen in 1954 and by the end of 1955 he had released a further twenty-one. The following year’s releases fell back to the 1954 level and then a distinct drop into the occasional, erratic issue.

The previous year ended with Davis’s promotion of Dean Barlow’s “Be Faithful” on a rejuvenated Beacon label. Spurred on by the Deep River Boys’ success with “Sleepy Little Cowboy”—albeit in Sweden—Davis launched these two titles on a back-to-back release, again on the Beacon label but in another series. Confusingly, he used a number that he initially assigned in 1942—Beacon 104. The Deep River Boys and Dean Barlow and the Crickets did not make especially comfortable mutual backings.

After the contretemps with Harold Johnson in December, Davis clearly decided the best manner to avoid further problems was to record the Mellows once more. “Smoke from Your Cigarette” began selling well, an incentive to line up another session to showcase Lillian Leach fronting the Mellows. Davis signed her to an artist contract for “I Still Care” (for a generous 2 cent royalty), about a week before the session on January 27 at 6:00 P.M. Leroy Kirkland assembled a piano-led quartet and managed to retain both Mickey Baker and Milt Hinton from the group that produced Lillian Leach’s hit ballad. The session aimed for another ballad hit and only the endearing “Loveable Lilly” was danced at a rapid tempo. With some deft and pretty work “Yesterday’s Memories” featured the other side of Mickey Baker’s guitar playing. Sadly, “I Was a Fool to Let You Go” and “I Still Care” didn’t follow the earlier release up the charts and Davis lost interest in the group.

Some two weeks later, Davis booked the Mastertone Studio for another Dean Barlow session but the first two in the session were sung by Ernestine Hassel Abbott, who lived on Harlem's West 127th Street. Once again Leroy Kirkland led the 6:00 P.M. session with a six-piece band that added two saxes (Al Sears on alto and baritone saxist Bill Crump) to the four-piece group that had accompanied the Mellows. The crying ballad "Special Delivery" (credited to DJ Alan Freed) highlights the excellent and inventive Mickey Baker soloing over quiet saxes until Al Sears cuts loose on a chilling alto solo. "Don't You Ever Let Me Go," penned by "Ernestina," as she was credited on her Jay-Dee 800 release, again features Baker and Sears over Hinton's fine, walking bass.

For some reason Ms. Abbott asked to be released from her contract within the month and Davis complied. She anxiously assured Davis that her request was due to personal reasons only. "I respect you," she wrote, "and have nothing against you or the firm you head." Davis probably agreed quite readily as the coupling—despite the fine band—was none too strong and cannot have sold well.

Even with a strong band and its star session men, Dean Barlow's "I'll String Along with You" and "It Doesn't Happen Every Day" proved quite tepid. Nonetheless, Davis kept faith and booked two more sessions featuring Barlow as a solo artist and released several records over the next six months. Davis certainly pushed Barlow as he pushed no one else since the 5 Red Caps. His files include several publicity shots with Dean Barlow appearing at various radio stations with DJs, black and white, suggesting a careful Davis campaign aimed at a crossover market. Eight days after the session he signed a contract with Barlow to be his exclusive manager for five years, marking the end of the second edition of the Crickets.

Some two weeks after the Dean Barlow and Ernestine Hassel Abbott session Davis decided to aim for a sax-led instrumental hit, and took into the studio one of the most underrated tenor sax men of the period, Warren Lucky. Aside from a stint in Ernie Fields's always-excellent territory band in 1944–1945, almost nothing is known about him. Lucky also played with Dizzy Gillespie's abortive big band of late 1945, which then included future stars Kenny Dorham (trumpet), tenor player Charlie Rouse, and master percussionist Max Roach. His recordings began in 1946 with a Musicraft date with Milt Jackson as well as session work for Savoy. Around the same time Lucky performed at the Spotlite Club in Dizzy's band alongside Sonny Stitt, with the awesome rhythm section of the eclectic pianist Thelonious Monk, bassist Ray Brown, and drummer Kenny Clarke.

Clearly no beginner and a well-seasoned and respected jazz player, Lucky himself arranged this session and collected double-AFM rates (\$82.50) for assembling a fine six-piece unit. He gathered effectively the same quartet who had been used for the past two Davis sessions; Ernest Hayes (piano), Mickey Baker on guitar, drummer Specs Bailey, but he used Peck Morrison instead of Milt Hinton on bass. Incidentally, Lucky, Hayes, and Bailey had been on Mickey Baker's *Rainbow* session. Haywood Henry on baritone sax, the ex-Erskine Hawkins section man and an overlooked early bop-influenced musician, filled out the sound.

Finding appropriate titles for sax instrumentals during this period of blue-infused hard bop jazz frequently posed problems, but Warren Lucky's session would appear to have had them in profusion. On one sheet retained by Davis the titles were given as "Flip Flop," "Blow Hard," "Home Fries," and "Steady Grind." By the time of the session, one of the titles had become "Thunderbolt"—probably "Flip Flop." "Steady Grind" was renamed "Fish Bait," probably with a view to having a better chance of receiving airplay. In the end, Davis re-titled "Home Fries" as "Paradise Rock" and "Blow Hard" as "Paradise Roll," with writer Dolores Davega of Long Island suitably recompensed.

These four titles certainly rate among the hottest tenor sax instrumentals of the period, with truly exciting riffs and searing, inventive runs by Lucky. "Paradise Rock" and "Paradise Roll" were coupled on the penultimate Jay-Dee release, 809, near the end of 1955. It is not known which Paradise is being singled out for glory, but it might have been the Paradise Club in Atlantic City, more probable than Small's Paradise in New York. "Fish Bait" and "Thunderbolt" (Beacon 105) probably preceded the Jay-Dee release and followed immediately behind the improbable Crickets / Deep River Boys pairing. Once again this duplicated a 1942 release, the one with Irving Kaufman (!) on vocal, but then another "Thunderbolt" had been a 1919 recording by the Louisiana Five. Both were issued as by Warren (Tenor Sax) Luckey and Combo; for reasons unknown Davis always spelled Warren's last name with an "e."

Less than a week later Davis invited Otis Blackwell back to the Master-tone Studio for an evening session at which four titles were recorded, all released on Jay-Dee. Leroy Kirkland retained the rhythm quartet of Ernest Hayes, Mickey Baker, Milt Hinton, and Specs Bailey, which had served him well since the January Mellows session. He augmented this quartet with baritone saxophonist Haywood Henry next to the utterly reliable Sam Taylor on tenor sax. The fine accompaniment helped boast "Let the Daddy

Hold You” to become one of Blackwell’s best songs. With whatever justification, Blackwell felt increasingly dissatisfied with this deal and sought outlets for his material elsewhere.

In May Davis booked two sessions; one with his new major artist (as he saw him) Dean Barlow, and the other with a complete unknown, pianist Abner Kenon. Barlow’s occurred first and enjoyed the five-man front line band Leroy Kirkland assembled: Sam Taylor on tenor sax, Dave McRae on alto sax (not his usual session instrument), and yet another baritone sax player in Joe Evans. Kirkland engaged trumpet stalwart Taft Jordan and, most surprisingly, added Jimmy Cleveland on trombone. A year before, Cleveland had recorded with the Quincy Jones–arranged session for pianist George Wallington and by 1957 was to be on the classic Miles Davis Columbia Records *Miles Ahead* album (with Taft Jordan).

Sadly, the band earned only one up-tempo number, “Don’t Leave Me, Baby,” with fine, New Orleansy saxes and excellent piano. The driving band feeds a particularly creative Mickey Baker, who lifts Sam Taylor to a soaring tenor sax solo. If only Dean Barlow’s voice measured up to the band, but he was no Jimmy Rushing or Wynonie Harris. Interestingly, Alan Freed received 100 percent credit for the song “Forever” and is so credited on the label and in a contract with Davis dated May 4.

Two weeks later, toward the end of the month, Davis recorded just two titles from pianist Abner Kenon. The smooth appearance of his publicity photograph comes across in his music, although the five-piece band, with two saxes, provides thoroughly professional and solid backing. The session files are absent from Davis’s effects, so one can take many guesses as to personnel, but aurally Sam Taylor is on tenor sax and perhaps Mickey Baker handles the guitar. “Looka What You Did to Me” is the better of the two, but little more satisfying vocally than it is grammatically.

Before Davis released the last of his Mellows couplings he signed yet another vocal group, the Goldentones from Brooklyn. On June 28 they entered the Mastertone Studio to cut just two titles, some two weeks after agreeing to terms with Davis. “The Meaning of Love”—a slow ballad—featured a nice sax solo, while Jimmy Shirley’s deft Mickey Baker–influenced guitar highlights the up-tempo “Run Pretty Baby.” These sides featured quite a different rhythm section, although many had previously worked on Davis sessions: most notably drummer Panama Francis and the excellent Al Williams returned to the piano bench. Dave McRae provided saxophone accompaniment, though uncharacteristically on baritone. This choice clearly surprised Davis, too, for his session notes show him on alto.

By the end of the year Everett Winder, on behalf of the group, wrote to Davis to ask to be released from the contract a little early. He also inquired if Davis objected to them recording "Diana!" and "Heater," which they apparently auditioned at their session, for another company. Davis apparently offered no objection to either request.

The split session with Dean Barlow and Ernestina in February clearly suited Davis, for in early July he set up another. Once again he coupled an artist he had already recorded (albeit only as a sideman) with a new female singer. On July 5 he signed a contract with Laverne Holt (she signed La Verne) to record two selections, "Mr. Black Man" and "If You Play You Must Pay," with a five-man accompaniment at Mastertone Studios at 7:00 P.M. on July 7. This particular contract—and perhaps others—contains a stipulation that the artist pay Davis \$500.00, for which Davis (the Company) agreed to "get out for public distribution and disk jockey consumption phonograph records within ten days after the recordings are made. The Company also agrees to send sample records to Distributors and Disk Jockeys of Radio Stations through the South or other points deemed best by the Company. The Company agrees to press a minimum of 500 78's and 500 45's." In the contract Davis also agreed to "a royalty of 5% of the retail price of each record sold and paid for." Laverne Holt, highly unlikely to receive much back of her \$500.00, must have been very anxious to have her songs recorded.

"If You Play" is rather ordinary but "Mr. Black Man," released on a special black label Jay-Dee 123 issue with silver lettering, contains very powerful lyrics suggesting, on the surface, that it comes from a far later period:

O-wee, Mister Black Man, fine as you can be, x 2  
But it's a real dirty shame you don't know your history.

When you talk about the Negro, where is Negro land? x 2  
Black Man's been here ever since the world began.

Wake up Mister Black Man, please listen to my plea, x 2  
You've been living in a dream but you've got to face reality.

O-wee, Mister Black Man don't you love a gal like me, x 2  
I'm a fine black beauty, proud of the fact you see.

Mister Black Man, please listen to my plea, x 2  
A man without a root is like a stump left from a tree.

These bold lyrics, recorded at the very beginning of the modern civil rights era are a plea for black pride and power, much like James Brown and others would a decade later. Holt's forward-looking statement predates Rosa Parks's very public refusal to sit in the back of the bus by some five months. Her recording occurred slightly more than two years prior to Louis Armstrong's cancellation of a federal government-sponsored trip to Russia in protest of the mishandling of the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. For such a song to be recorded and issued in 1955 remains nothing less than remarkable. That Joe Davis stood behind the project and that the label bore his initials is utterly in keeping with both his politics and personal conduct.

The session commenced at 7:00 P.M., as agreed in the contract, and Laverne Holt arrived on time. For whatever reason, and apparently to her initial satisfaction, the disc—released around mid-July 1955—credits Enyatta Holta as the songwriter and performer. A test pressing exists of “Mr. Black Man,” clearly an audio test, sung by the artist with only a pianist in accompaniment. Aurally, its the same pianist as appeared on the session, Al Williams. The balance of the group on the issued take comprised Everett Barksdale on guitar, bassist Bill Pemberton, Bobby Donaldson on drums, while Haywood Henry handled the baritone sax.

Some months later, Davis received an undated and most unsettling letter from Laverne Holt, so much so that he obtained her telephone number and wrote it in pencil beside her address, presumably in order to contact her immediately. This often-muddled and seldom-clear letter is worth quoting extensively, if only because it shows the degree of trust which Davis brought out in many of his artists:

My dear Mr. Davies,

My respect for you is more than just “words,” for words never expresses the true meaning of a persons feeling. My respect does not come from any material reason, but from “knowledge of your integrity” that is unquestionable. Upon that integrity I went out to tackle a job that was unnecessary from the very beginning.

Thanks to Willie Bryant plus King Houdini I am indebted for all my “bitter frustration” and mental anguish. All definately results from their maliced, deceitful, destructive, ignorant, debauched, filthy, degraded, evil, subverted minds. To my estimation they are not fit to live and associate with people who use truth as a basic principle of life . . . [edited]

No conceivable torture could compensate for the suffering to me both past and present. The more I receive, the more determined I am to accomplish, in spite of all like them.

When I reach my goal I will contact you. As for what I said I wouldn't care who knows it. I have nothing to lose the way I feel now. Logically, come hell or high water, nothing can hurt me now.

Sincerely,

La Verne Holt

This amazing diatribe was clearly written in great anger and under massive pressure. What she might have done to the persons whom she blamed for her current condition was both alarming and imaginative. No evidence among Davis's papers indicates that she ever reached her goal, whatever it might have been.

Most people in the music business simply would have thrown the letter away, rather than keep it and clearly try to help in some way. She must have remained in Davis's thoughts for a considerable time for, in the 1970s, he reissued a very few of his earlier discs on a new light blue Davis label including the Enyatta Holta coupling as Davis 799. That series, otherwise, was his 1955–1956 Jay-Dee release series and 799 had been Dean Barlow's "It Doesn't Happen Every Day"—oddly prophetic in view of the apparent tragedy of Laverne Holt.

The balance of the session brought two titles from Laverne Holt's accompanying band, under the nominal leadership of Haywood Henry, his first release under his own name. Both were standards: the ballad "Tenderly" and "Sweet Georgia Brown." These tunes sat on the shelf for almost a decade before appearing in 1964 on the Hudco label, owned by Bertha Davis and named after her grandson, William "Hud" Collins.

Whatever happened after that July session, Davis remained absent from the studio for six months. Possibly thinking it might gain publicity for the Crickets/Deep River Boys coupling plus the Warren Lucky release, Davis decided to reactivate yet another label—Davis—that had grown inactive. Three issues came out on Davis before the end of 1955 and mostly fitted into the block of matrix numbers following the July session. One coupling, at least, consisted of titles recorded long before. The initial Davis release, Davis 441, was by a vocal group, the Millionaires (actually the old Blenders, re-titled and with revamped matrix numbers). Davis recycled titles recorded before he left MGM in the spring of 1953: "Somebody's Lyin'," an old 5 Red Caps song, and the jaunty, if rather



childish, "Kansas Kapers." The other two releases were by Ginny Gibson and Anita Bryant.

Fifteen-year-old Anita Bryant from Oklahoma debuted on Davis 443. This quite unremarkable record launched a career that included becoming Miss Oklahoma in 1958 and earning a second runner-up in the 1959 Miss America beauty pageant at age nineteen. Between 1959 and 1969 she placed eleven songs in the "U.S. Top One Hundred" selling 45 rpm records. "Paper Roses" reached #5 in 1960, though most of them lurked in the lower levels. Perhaps best known for her virulent and very public stance against homosexuality in the late 1970s, Bryant most recently returned to Edmond, Oklahoma, as the head of the charitable Anita Bryant Ministries International.

Soon afterward, Davis heard from another Anita—Anita Tucker. In October he received her Capitol publicity postcard from the Home Show Bar in Detroit. She had been on the road for three months and was due to move on to Chicago in November. Tucker also mentioned that her new Capitol disc would be out on November 7. "Dig it crazy," the publicity card exhorted.

Davis's files disclose few activities in the latter half of 1955, but three letters show the direction he was still following. On September 15 he received a letter from one Babe Scott on behalf of a vocal group called the Dells, giving the names of the group's members (Charles Dry, Albert Braun, Charles Stokes, and Irving Redditt) "as you asked for." Two names had been crossed out; Hilton Scott and William Bryson, both of whom were under-age. Clearly a New York group (their phone number bore a local exchange), Scott ended by writing that they "would be waiting to hear when you want us up there and ready any time you say." It doesn't seem, however, that Davis ever contacted them.

In mid-December the postal service delivered a strongly worded letter from Lillian Leach, John Wilson, and Harold Johnson of the Mellows. Whatever trouble had been brewing over the past year had clearly come to a head: "In view of your failure to live up to the terms and conditions of our Contract, dated: July 12th, 1954, we hereby notify you that said Contract is cancelled; and that you are no longer authorized to act for us, in any way, shape, or form whatsoever."

Presumably, "Lovable Lilly" and "Yesterday's Memories" had just been released and Davis obviously did not intend to contest the situation, as he had done a year before. Davis probably realized that the group was not selling well enough to contest the termination of the contract. The letter,

perhaps significantly, bore the hallmarks of someone with knowledge of legal terminology.

Within a few days of receipt of the Mellows' letter Davis signed two new vocal groups, one of them from out of town. The Chestnuts (based in nearby New Haven, Connecticut) comprised five male singers: LeRoy Griffin, James Curtis, Frank Hopkins, Lyman Hopkins Jr., and Reuben White. By the time they came to record, nearly four months later, only the last three were still in the group. Lyman Hopkins's father sang with them as did a female vocalist, Ruby Whitaker. Her presence as a lead singer suggests that Davis, in more ways than one, was attempting to replace the Mellows. The other group, the local Scale-Tones consisted of members from 8th Avenue, Amsterdam Avenue, Brooklyn, and Jamaica, Long Island. They signed their contract on Christmas Eve, 1955, one week after the Chestnuts, but were the first to record, perhaps because their group was not to be altered.

As a final note to 1955, when renewing the copyright for "Wylie Avenue Blues," Davis claimed it in his name and that of Portia Grainger, daughter of the late Porter Grainger. When first published, by Triangle Music in 1927, Davis and Grainger were credited as writers. Upon renewal, more than one might have been tempted to drop the name of the deceased co-writer, but not Joe Davis.

## Chapter Eleven

# Listen to Dr. Jive

Joe Davis booked the Mastertone Studio for late evening on the first Friday of 1956 to record titles from the Scale-Tones. Typically, Davis rehearsed the group before the session and at least one song was recorded at a run-through session, with only a pianist and drummer in attendance. He jotted down seven titles on a scrap of paper and only “Easy Baby” survived on an acetate. The group was augmented by James Fernanders, who might be responsible for the high female-like, falsetto part heard on this track, but not on the session, from which he was absent.

Davis’s notes list a session from 8:00 P.M. to 11:00 P.M. on Thursday, January 5, but had 8:00 P.M. on Wednesday scrawled on it, inferring that the rehearsal was planned for Wednesday evening followed by the recording session the next day. In fact, the recordings took place on Friday. For this date, Davis carefully assembled perhaps the strongest possible rhythm section: pianist Al Williams, Mickey Baker on guitar, bass player Milt Hinton, all of whom were driven by Panama Francis on the drums. In a moment of inspiration he added Warren Lucky on tenor sax, surely the most exciting of all his sax session men, despite the frequent presence of Sam Taylor.

The group recorded only three of the titles they rehearsed, although “Easy Baby” was allocated a fourth matrix number initially, but it had to be canceled, presumably through lack of time. Davis chose to issue “Dreaming and Dreaming” and “Everlasting Love,” which teamed a ballad with pretty guitar from Mickey Baker, and a mid-tempo, raunchy number with plenty of excellent tenor sax. That left “Working for My Baby” as perhaps one of the better up-tempo R&B/vocal group titles of the 1950s never to have been released at the time, with truly memorable work from Warren Lucky over chunky chords from Baker and Milt Hinton’s solid bass line. The released coupling, Jay-Dee 810, sadly ended this uneven but occasionally exciting label series for Davis.

Unfortunately the exceptionally talented Warren Lucky (whose Jay-Dee 809 proved to be the penultimate label release) lapsed back into obscurity, although he continued performing and got some session work in the city. In 1961 he was playing at the “Baby Grand,” along with singer Linda Hopkins and emcee Nipsey Russell. Today, aside from his work with Dizzy Gillespie and his association with Davis, Lucky remains virtually unknown to all but the most ardent jazz or R&B scholar. The Scale-Tones, too, slipped from sight and, on behalf of the group, Don Archer accepted \$25.00 “in full payment” for the two released songs. Jay-Dee 810 sold so poorly that Davis probably failed to even recoup the session fees.

Their single was released on February 18, by which time Davis had already recorded two further sessions, one by another vocal group, the Chestnuts, and the other with his current pop hope, Dean Barlow. Unusually, five titles were recorded at the Dean Barlow session, but only four released. This time, pianist Howard Biggs also served as the arranger and he recruited guitarist Everett Barksdale, with Lloyd Trotman on bass and Panama Francis, as usual, on drums. The two-sax front line comprised Davis session stalwarts Sam Taylor on tenor and Haywood Henry on baritone. Three of these titles, “Hi Ya Honey,” “Can’t Stand It Any Longer,” and “Listen to Dr. Jive,” are good up-tempo numbers with plenty of room for the soloists and workman-like vocals from Dean Barlow. In typical Davis fashion, one of the two ballads recorded recycled the old Bon Bon hit, “Truthfully,” which had also done well for Steve Gibson’s Red Caps on Victor. Recorded on January 18, “Hi Ya Honey” and “As God Is My Judge” (Davis 444) received a brief review in *The Billboard* on February 4, which demonstrates how quickly a highly motivated Davis could operate. “Listen to Dr. Jive” remained unreleased until 1983, possibly as the session typically called for only four titles, leaving this title the odd side out when Davis issued these selections by the Chestnuts in 1956. Nonetheless, Davis took the precaution of copyrighting “Listen to Dr. Jive” (a homage to New York show presenter and DJ on Station WWRL, Tommy Smalls) on April 16, 1956.

Booked through the prestigious Shaw Artists Corporation on Fifth Avenue, several of Dean Barlow’s engagement contracts for the spring of 1956 survive. Beginning on March 22 (Thursday through Sunday) he headlined for four nights at the Hampden Music Club in Springfield, Massachusetts. The following Friday, March 30, Barlow appeared as a solo “singing act” at New York City’s Apollo Theater for one week. Several weeks later—on April 14 and 15—he spent two days performing at the State Theater, Hartford,

Connecticut, which paid only \$100.00 per week as opposed to the other's \$150.00: presumably earning about \$30 for the two nights' work. His State Theater contract also confirmed that he needed to appear for rehearsal at 9:30 A.M. on the opening day of the engagement. The Apollo might have been paying \$150.00 a week but he was expected to perform "31 shows max." in those seven days—less than \$5.00 a performance if he appeared at all thirty-one. It may have been coverage but it was hard work.

Coincidentally, this Dean Barlow session shows the significance of individual DJs in the prospect of "breaking" a single. Joe Davis had specifically written his eulogy celebrating Tommy Smalls's ongoing radio and record promotion career, which continued until his sudden death in 1972:

If you're feelin' kinda low,  
And your pulse is beatin' slow,  
And you wanna feel alive,  
Listen to Doctor Jive!  
If you wanna cure your ills,  
Without medicine or pills,  
Here's a treatment won't cost five—just  
Listen to Doctor Jive!  
He's the doctor with the beat,  
Puts the rhythm in your feet,  
And rhythm in the feet supplies the heat  
That keeps you healthy and lookin' sweet;  
You will thrive and you'll survive  
Till your old age checks arrive  
So look ahead and look alive—and  
Listen to Doctor Jive.

Davis also used a photograph of DJ Alan Freed to plug his second Dean Barlow release from the session. "Alan Freed Radio Station WINS, New York," the publicity sheet proclaimed, "picks for a hit 'Truthfully' sung by Dean Barlow." It didn't hit, unfortunately. But given the long acquaintance shared by the two men (Freed used his "Moondog" show over WJW, Cleveland, Ohio, to help plug Davis's latest releases), Freed's endorsement comes as no surprise. One intriguing aircheck exists, sadly undated, but certainly from 1954, before he moved to WINS and lost his "Moondog" tag to the New York street performer of that name—aka Louis Thomas Hardin.

Speaking over the howling of his “moondog,” which announced his show, Freed says:

Alright, moondog, get in there, kid. Howl out buddy. See Joe Davis sittin’ over there. Don’t let him near your bones, kids, or all those moon-dog bones’ll be gone. Joe’s a wonderful guy. It’s always grand to see him. Made some wonderful records with those Crickets, Otis Blackwell. Music publisher—he’s been around this business for a long time!

Hello, everybody! How y’all tonight? This is Alan Freed, the old king of the moondoggers.

Freed’s comments suggest that it wasn’t the first time that Davis had dropped by, but he didn’t hear one of his tunes kick off the show. After the Erin beer advertisement, the tenor sax of Gil Bernal kicked off “The Whip” from the West Coast label, Spark.

A month to the day after the Dean Barlow session, Davis again booked the Mastertone Studio for an 8:00 P.M. start for a six-piece combo session led by tenor sax man Al King, whom he had last recorded in 1952 for lease to MGM. Al King wrote to Davis from the Hurricane Club in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, stating that “enclosed you’ll find lead sheets with melodies and chords of tunes . . . I’ve put some names on these tunes as we call them while playing but if you think of anything different or better just go ahead on and use it huh?” “Joy Ride” was one of the titles King submitted and Davis saw no reason to alter it.

Apart from Solomon Moore on baritone sax, Al King’s group remains unknown. Davis apparently planned enough titles for an entire twelve-inch, long-playing album, for his own session sheet marked twelve title spaces from matrix DA-361 through DA-372. King’s session used only the first six and although all were marked “OK” by Davis, only three received titles. The band recorded “Joy Ride” last, which he noted as “fast—very good except intro,” and Davis edited the offending introduction from the version he released later that year. The 1983 long-playing album re-release of “Joy Ride” returned the tune to its original state. The issued flip was a moody ballad, “Melancholy Horn,” while the only one of the remaining four unissued tunes to receive a title was “Jay Bird.” Shown on the session sheet simply as “Al King (tenor sax) + 5 men,” the lone release came out under the credit of Al King and His Kingsmen. The name must have been decided before the session ended, as the Mastertone acetates so credit him.

All in all, this fell more into the jazz mold than King's 1952 recordings for Royal Crowns Records and pointed to Davis's direction later in the year.

The session also indicated another direction, that of the long-playing album. From the middle of the year on, Davis cut sessions that resulted in four long-playing albums; two of them by solo pianists Erskine Butterfield and Frank Signorelli. The other, a jazzy R&B disc by sax man Haywood Henry, perhaps took over what might otherwise have been an Al King album. The fourth was by an otherwise nondescript singer, Faye Richmond, and it featured some risqué numbers. The session was also the innocuous start in yet another direction that ultimately cost Davis dearly.

Wednesday became the preferred day for Davis to record, and his next session occurred on a Wednesday evening in April, with the other vocal group—the Chestnuts—he had signed just before Christmas 1955. Now a five-piece group using female lead singer Ruby Whitaker, much like Mellows, the session utilized a group almost identical to the one that backed Dean Barlow in January. The musicians featured only one sax, the ever-reliable Sammy Taylor on tenor, while veteran guitarist Skeeter Best replaced Everett Barksdale, whose career stretched back to Erskine Tate's orchestra in the early 1930s. This time the Chestnuts managed to record four titles, all of which Davis released on two singles. Davis clearly favored ballads by the group, as the first pairing showed; "It's You I Love" and "Love Is True." Dr. Jive kept the faith and this disc soon entered his influential *WWRL* charts. "Forever I Vow," a slow ballad with a Ruby Whitaker lead, was aimed as the seller on the second coupling but the flip was an up-tempo number featuring excellent tenor sax. Its lead sheet accurately characterized the song as a "med. bounce." "Brother Ben," the lyrics pronounce, "has women all over town," but as writer Frank Hopkins sang, "I don't know how he gets so many, when I never see him with a dime."

In the spring of 1956 Davis seemingly sensed that the foundering singles market suggested a careful examination of long-playing albums as a potential growth area. As it happens, only three remaining sessions from 1956 were geared toward singles releases on his Davis label. The others appeared more oriented toward long-playing albums, though ultimately albums proved the undoing of his business.

As always, Davis's other business continued receiving his attention and April found him involved with copyright matters related to his back catalogue. In that month he received a complicated letter dated April 4, 1956, from Abraham L. Kaminstein, head of the Library of Congress's Examining Division, regarding his copyright renewal on "Save It, Pretty Mama,"

which he had previously registered in March 1929. Kaminstein questioned the validity of Davis's application for renewal as "proprietor," because he was the coauthor, and suggested "perhaps a different renewal claimant." The letter prompted Davis to submit a new renewal application with a revised basis of claim and, whatever the basis of the claim made by Davis, it resulted in a satisfactory outcome.

Davis next recorded "Save It, Pretty Mama" in 1957 at a session with Lee Castle's jazz band. If one doubts that Davis thought so far ahead, remember that he had been contemplating the future of long-playing records since early 1956 and that at present he had eight Lee Castle titles recorded from two previous sessions. A third session of four more titles would provide an album. Even if Davis had not actually planned a Lee Castle album as early as the spring of 1956, it seems highly probable that the idea came to him once he had successfully completed the copyright renewal for "Save It, Pretty Mama." Also in April 1956, Beacon Music won election for membership of ASCAP and, inexplicably, Davis remastered two earlier titles from 1950 by Bob Houston's orchestra. Whatever occasioned Davis to remaster and reissue "Mamma Mia" and "In the Valley of Golden Dreams" remains obscure and is a curious business move.

By the summer Davis decided to move ahead with recording material for release on twelve-inch long-playing albums. His first session to test this new approach—with Erskine Butterfield—provided a compromise with his new direction and the needs of the singles market. Interestingly, his initial 1944 first sessions with Butterfield resulted in the release of all eight selections on two 10-inch 78 rpm "album" sets. Butterfield eventually recorded for other labels, such as De Luxe, but had largely been absent from the current scene for several years. Davis reunited the little band that had backed the Chestnuts: Sam Taylor, Skeeter Best, Lloyd Trotman, and Panama Francis. Butterfield, naturally, replaced Howard Biggs on piano.

On June 13—again a Wednesday—they recorded four titles at the Mastertone Studio, though the session began uncharacteristically early, at 11:00 A.M. Eventually Davis released two titles, "Boogie Woogie Ball" and "I'm the One," on Davis 458 but "Foo-Gee" and "My Solid Gold Automobile" remained unreleased until 1985. The latter two selections had been hits for the 5 Red Caps in 1943, while Butterfield recorded "Foo-Gee" himself for Decca in 1941; that same year, Doc Wheeler's territory band from Florida recorded it for Bluebird. One wonders if, in 1956, one of Doc Wheeler's sax section remembers having recorded it at his first recording session because the lead tenor sax in 1941 belonged to the young Sam Taylor.



This thoroughly professional, competent session seemed rather archaic in 1956 in an age when Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis set the standard for modern jazz. Skeeter Best once again produced some of his best Mickey Baker licks but Butterfield's laid-back piano and forties vocal was unlikely to sell when the top-three hot black records of the year were Bill Doggett's "Honky Tonk," Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill," and "The Great Pretender" by the Platters. On "Foo-Gee," the prominent instrument is Best's guitar and Taylor's sax lies way back in the mix; perhaps he didn't recall having recorded it fifteen years earlier. He certainly blows more forcibly on "I'm the One" and "Boogie Woogie Ball," on which Butterfield plays pleasant, though not particularly forward-looking piano. The lyrics to the boogie number sound far too dated. "My Solid Gold Automobile," an odd number despite some nice backing, perhaps explains why Davis didn't use it. With its slightly surrealistic lyrics, very much like "Willie the Weeper," this song would have been the most up-to-date title from the session, with its excellent Sam Taylor-Mickey Baker duets.

After the session with Butterfield and His Blues Boys, as his one release called them, the pianist cut two piano solos; remakes of the first two titles recorded at the 1944 session in original recording order. These moves suggest that Davis had the idea of making a long-playing album, but did not expect to be able to record twelve titles in one shift. With "Light-House" and "Part-Time Boogie," recorded at the end of this small combo session, Davis obtained two titles toward his album. Seven days later they returned to the same studio for a 1:00 P.M. start. Butterfield recorded ten titles in only half the allocated time, completing the session at 3:00 P.M., which certainly delighted Davis. Not long before, he had booked three hours with a vocal group and found himself unable to release more than one single. Yet with Butterfield, he had managed to record ten titles in a mere one and a half hours, more than half of which ran to over three minutes, and two of them ran past the four-minute mark.

Most of the titles Butterfield performed were remakes from 1944 but a few, such as "Blackberry Jam," "Monday's Wash," and "Chocolate" (all of them Butterfield compositions) had originally been recorded for Beacon about the same time by pianist Deryck Sampson. The album bore the uninspired title "Piano Cocktail," and eventually became the fourth in Davis's LP series. Intriguingly, the notes appear to have been written by Davis himself, for they include personal statements by Butterfield and a knowledge of the music that could only have been written by someone close to his scene. Time and again the notes cite influences on

Butterfield's style. "Light-House" contains "those funny chords in the left hand, like [pianist Art] Tatum used to do," while "Blackberry Jam" salutes the underrated Sauter-Finnegan band. "'Saturday Night Twist' [is] based on a riff Tatum used and 'Chocolate' was written with Basie's band of the thirties . . . in mind." Sadly, the album brought neither fame nor much money for either Davis or Butterfield and the pianist died five years later in 1961.

Perhaps a calendar-year 1955 royalty statement to Otis Blackwell, completed in June 1956, suggests why Davis decided to move toward the album market and step away from the singles market. It showed a balance due to Davis of some \$2,000.00—the cost of the several sessions plus seven \$25.00 payments listed for dates between June and December 1955. Against the \$2,000 sat Blackwell's meager sales of records plus copyright royalties and record royalties that increased from 1 percent to 2 and one-half percent during this period. The year 1955 kicked off with "Daddy Rolling Stone" and "Tears Tears Tears," which sold only 431 records, while "Let the Daddy Hold You" and "Oh What a Wonderful Time" moved a paltry 208 copies. Davis peddled 650 copies of Blackwell's penultimate 1955 release, while four other singles sold only a dozen or fewer. One can well understand the disappointment of Blackwell, not to say of Davis, and imagine how these poor sales led to conflict.

If Davis could successfully record an entire album from a pianist such as Butterfield in two sessions, this accomplishment suggested a new approach. Less than a month later he recorded two sessions from his old friend, Frank Signorelli, resulting in "Piano Moods," which Davis described in the sleeve notes as "piano playing that's both pretty and pert, airy and artful, sentimental and scintillating. It has been composed and performed especially for this occasion by one of the most respected, talented and beloved gents in the music field."

It's hard to believe that this pianist subbed for Henry Ragas in the Original Dixieland Jazz Band at Reisenweber's restaurant in New York during World War I, for these sides feature a pianist of considerable sophistication, a product of his long years in the business. Signorelli, a true professional, underscored his versatility by becoming a well-known jingle writer for television advertisements. Occasionally, these recordings dropped into such less adventurous fare as "Bonnie's Boogie," with similar boogie hints in "Eighty-Eight Keys to Brooklyn." Other titles such as "Fire-side Fantasy," "Waltzing with a Dream," and "Goin' Nowhere Fast" sum up the mellow moods of the album. It must have been just what Davis looked

for as an alternative to the poor-selling expense of recording and releasing 45 rpm singles.

Just one week after the previous Signorelli session, Davis recorded yet another vocal group from New Haven, Connecticut. Unlike the Chestnuts, with their female lead, the Pyramids were an all-male quartet. Pianist Al Williams arranged a six-piece combo to back them, which included Haywood Henry on baritone sax and Skeeter Best on guitar, on three rather tepid ballads and “Okay Baby,” a rocker written by Danny Taylor, whom Davis recorded exactly one week later. To all intents and purposes, the Pyramids became the last of the vocal groups Davis recorded for release on one of his own labels.

Interestingly, the contract for the Pyramids covered just six months, beginning July 24, 1956, and it showed that they had paid Davis \$700.00 “to cover expenses for the first record.” Perhaps, after all, this payment became the only reason that Davis recorded them. At least they could brag about the two releases from the session and Davis cut no corners on the session. He used top New York session men, including two saxes—one of them the man in highest demand, Sam Taylor. With Carl Pruitt on bass and Specs Bailey on drums, Davis spent their money very well, though the returns proved meager. By year’s end, their tiny royalty check was based on 746 copies sold—mostly on 78s.

When Davis set about recording Danny Taylor the following week, he used the very same band that had backed the Pyramids. He had initially decided to record Taylor on August 1 but the date was postponed for a week, perhaps in order to accommodate the Pyramids session, perhaps because they’d paid up-front. Davis and Taylor went back for nearly a decade and Davis had probably been instrumental in arranging his Coral sides, leased from the original Wheeler issue; presumably owned by Doc Wheeler. Taylor also recorded for the small New York City-based Parody label as well as for RCA, and must have known Davis well because he asked for the loan of bail money not long before his Coral release. Taylor, a prolific songwriter, caused the lead-sheet writer a great deal of work in order to transfer his scribbles into presentable format. Nonetheless, Taylor impressed Davis enough to use his material, and—as the Pyramids session showed—not only on Taylor’s own session. Taylor’s handwritten song list of some eighty-three titles shows that Raleigh Music published most of them, although others were published by Progressive, Marlyn, and even Shalimar Music Corporation, which eventually crossed Davis’s path during the later Otis Blackwell litigation.

Taylor cut four titles with this excellent little band but Davis released only two, "Makeena" and "There's Nothin' Wrong with This World." Davis certainly wasted no time and ordered labels for the release, Davis 454, the day following the session, which ended at 10:00 P.M. Intriguingly, Taylor originally extended the title with a clause: "Ain't Nothing Wrong with (This) World, It's Just the People." Davis altered the grammar and decided to delete the extension. Taylor cannot have been totally happy, for on the reverse of his very crudely handwritten sheet, he notes: "I don't know why they acked [axed?] this wan? [*sic*] This is a [?] old world I think it is okay." It wasn't axed, whatever else might have happened to it, and the disc (released as by Danny "Run Joe" Taylor) received positive reviews in the trade magazines by October and by the close of the month he'd received almost \$240.00 in royalties, no doubt good news.

By now the Davis label had largely run its course. Davis followed Danny Taylor's October coupling with five more R&B releases, and only the second Pyramids pairing and the Erskine Butterfield were new releases from recent recordings. The others included a Crickets pairing from April 1953, a Sparrows September 1953 coupling, and an Otis Blackwell disc: "Daddy Rolling Stone" from his first session in 1953 and "You Move Me Baby" from his final one in 1955. Davis 458 by Erskine Butterfield and the sides by the Pyramids and the Crickets were released with the usual silver-on-black label, but the latter two releases featured a different logo, identical with that used on the albums.

Patterns to the releases remain enigmatic, but there must have been some reasons for those selections. For instance, The Sparrows' 1953 previously unreleased "Love Me Tender" apparently inspired Davis to alter the matrix number from DA-259 to read DA-400 10/1/56. He must have forgotten that ten weeks earlier he had allocated that matrix number to Frank Signorelli's "Eighty-Eight Keys to Brooklyn," and gone on to use up to DA-410. If nothing else, Davis couldn't be accused of over-occupation with matrix numbers. Indeed, within the next few months, he was to allocate the same block of four matrix numbers to both Lee Castle's jazz band and Faye Richmonde's slightly risqué songs.

While scheming the most effective exit from the singles market, Davis planned to record the album of sax-led instrumentals he began in February with Al King. He contacted Haywood Henry, then living out at 555 Edgcombe Avenue, New York City, and hired Sammy Lowe to co-arrange the session using session men mostly familiar with Davis: pianist Al Williams, Skeeter Best on guitar, bass player Al Lucas, and Bobby Donaldson

on drums. To this unit they added the vibes of John Grimes. This unit recorded six titles focusing on Henry's baritone sax, all of them standard ballads such as "Star Dust," "Always," "September Song," and "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You." For reasons unknown Davis broke the spell of the Wednesday sessions at Mastertone and settled for a Thursday. Perhaps because they recorded only six titles, Davis immediately decided to record another six ballad session (sans vibes) on the following Thursday, also commencing at 6:00 P.M. Davis combined these two sessions into an album entitled *I Love You Truly*, the last of the titles to be recorded, against a sleeve backdrop of Rodin's "Lovers."

Less than a week after the second Haywood Henry session, Davis recorded twelve songs at an afternoon Faye Richmonde session, accompanied only by Al Williams on piano. These selections were then known in the music business as "special material." Davis's liner notes carefully pointed out that singers like Ethel Waters, Sophie Tucker, Pearl Bailey, and "the late Bessie Smith" (an interesting phrase to use almost twenty years after her death) previously recorded risqué selections. Nine of these titles, in fact, had been recorded in 1946 by Betty Thornton. All of them, plus "She's Nine Months Gone from Home," came from Andy Razaf's pen, often with help from Fats Waller or Alex Hill. Only one was part-written by Davis himself.

Faye Richmonde, a Homestead, Pennsylvania, native, won a jitterbugging dancing contest with her brother in the Pennsylvania Tri-State contest and came into singing when the band with whom they were working fell ill and she subbed as a vocalist. "I hope you will derive as much pleasure listening to this album," prompted Davis in his notes, "as I have had in the making of it." Faye Richmonde's *A Little Spice* commenced the Davis album series at 101 and marked the entry of Davis into the burgeoning independent album field as well as his entry into the "special material" record business. Perhaps it was less the lyric content than the front covers, resplendent as they were with well-endowed models, often in the mold of the late Jane Russell, which caught record buyers' attention.

Davis JD-101 must have sold steadily beginning in 1957 because they sport two quite different front sleeves. The first provided the sort of view through a keyhole that the butler can seldom have seen, although this was too early for full frontal nudity of course. The model, Judy O'Day, came from photographer James J. Pappas's studio and had been on his books for a year by the time Davis cut the Faye Richmonde session. Indeed, the photograph used to advertise her wares as a model was the one that Davis used

for his album sleeve. For some reason later in the year Davis altered the front cover to depict quite another model, but no less well proportioned. As always, Davis scrupulously monitored his booking and payments. Professional models from professional studios were paid at standard fees, just as he paid AFM musician rates for his recording sessions. Faye Richmond received \$150.00 for her fall 1956 session, an arrangement that clearly suited both parties to her contract, for two further albums followed, to say nothing of anthologies including tracks from these albums.

Ten days after the Faye Richmond session, *The Billboard* (November 3, 1956), carried the headline "*Don't Be Cruel*" Is Cruelty to Pubber Davis—500G Worth, followed by this copy:

Otis Blackwell, cleffer-warbler who penned "Don't Be Cruel," "You're The Apple Of My Eye" and several other current rock and roll favorites, last week was one of several parties socked with a \$500,000 suit by publisher Joe Davis.

Co-defendents with Blackwell, charged with inducing Blackwell to break his writer-artist management contract with Davis, or of duplicity, were Shalimar Music, Elvis Presley Music and RCA Victor. The suit was filed in New York Supreme Court.

According to Davis, Blackwell was and is under contract to him, said contract having run for almost six consecutive years, and still having at least six months to run. However, said Davis, Blackwell proceeded to give his tunes to others, thus violating the pact. He did this Davis maintained, with the encouragement of these other parties, all of whom he charged were fully aware of Blackwell's obligations. Most significant of the tunes were the above mentioned smashes, cut by Elvis Presley for Victor, and published jointly by Shalimar Music and by Elvis Presley Music . . . Davis is claiming that Blackwell also wrote other songs under various pseudonyms.

The suit is asking for an accounting, damages and assignment of the various copyrights to Davis.

According to Lewis Dreyer, one of the defense attorneys, Davis himself rendered the contract void last year by failing to abide by its terms. The pact allegedly provided that Davis was to pay Blackwell \$25 a week, and also to record a minimum of 16 sides with him each year.

*The Billboard* had pointed out a week earlier (October 27) that the flip side of the Elvis Presley disc, "Hound Dog," had itself been the subject of

a lawsuit brought by Valjo Music against Presley Music and Lieber and Stoller, the writers. The column shrewdly commented at the end that the double-headed disc was already “well past the two-million sales mark.”

Davis genuinely felt he had a strong case against Blackwell, as indeed the courts confirmed the following year, but 1956 hadn’t proved very financially healthy for him. Twice in 1956 the Internal Revenue Service sought payments from Davis, starting in January when he owed them \$140.15 which they allowed him to pro rate over three months because he told them that “business in the past has been just plain rotten.” While it seems most improbable that he was unable to raise that sum quickly and in one payment, it is perhaps symptomatic of paying taxes at the last possible moment. By the end of the year the trouble was rather more serious, however, and the IRS wrote to him on December 14 ordering him to report to their Lexington Avenue offices unless he paid \$10,428.39, consisting of \$7,603.60 tax plus interest of \$2,824.79 “not paid since 1st of October.”

Thus ended the last serious year in which Davis involved himself in the current singles hit scene. Perhaps forty years in the business had been enough, but his enthusiasm with the admittedly problematic album business suggests that he no longer felt he could compete financially within the hit music scene. Other independents—such as Atlantic Records—had grown at a rate that left him behind and, frankly, the music no longer really suited him. He definitely decided that 1956 was his last year and drew up a chart to show “recordings made for Joseph M. Davis up to Dec. 19, 1956.”

Selections Recorded	[Year]	Records Released
33	1953	9
21	1954	14
28	1955	21
69	1956	13

His steady supply of recordings in 1953–1955 provided the peak of issues in 1955 but the sudden jump in selections recorded in 1956 is not reflected in releases because they were designed specifically for albums. Davis recorded twelve selections each from Erskine Butterfield, Haywood Henry, and Frank Signorelli. Interestingly, Davis specifically excluded from his list the twelve recorded by Faye Richmond. Eight other recordings, for micro-groove release, came from Eddie “Piano” Miller; they made up a ten-inch album and four were selected for an extended-play seven-inch disc. Miller, by the way, appears in Davis’s files under his true name, Eddie

Lisbona, and he recorded for Davis in 1954 with Cozy Cole on drums. Along with this earlier session, Davis now had sufficient titles to complete a twelve-inch album, JD-110, which sold well for Davis, appearing at later dates on both Beacon and Celebrity with the same release number.

Lisbona enjoyed a long and unusual recording career that began in London in 1931, where he recorded frequently with Jerry Hoey's band. He later recorded there with the Australian singer-violinist Brian Lawrence, who ran a hot little band. In his sleeve notes to the JD album, Davis saw fit to mention that Lisbona/Miller was an Englishman, from Manchester, where he saw the Paul Whiteman band play the famous Free Trade Hall in 1926. Davis also pointed out Miller's role as accompanist to Vera Lynn and Anne Shelton when he was with the Ambrose Orchestra. A long and varied career, indeed.

### Save It, Pretty Mama

Now that Joe Davis had directed his attention toward twelve-inch long-playing albums, he signed his first 1957 contract with jazz bandleader Lee Castle to cut four further titles for a twelve-track album. The contract, signed on January 8, called for a six-piece band to cut "Fair Jennies Lament," "Save It, Pretty Mama," "My Wild Irish Rose," and "Feeling Sentimental." Having by now reestablished his copyright to "Save It, Pretty Mama," Davis once again conducted a session at which he owned the music publishing on all titles. Castle seemed perfectly content with the contract and the fees "to be paid in about two weeks after the recording." The session occurred two days later at 3:00 P.M., once more a Thursday session at Mastertone Studios.

Perhaps at Davis's instigation, Castle attempted to gather together the same musicians from the 1954 sessions. Apart from Lou McGarity, living then in Boonton, New Jersey, they all resided in New York City. Sax man Bob Wilber replaced the unavailable Peanuts Hucko, while Dick Cary (piano), bassist Bob Haggart, and George Wettling on drums made up the rhythm section. Davis commenced the session with "Save It, Pretty Mama," but clearly forgot that he had already allocated this and the following three matrix numbers to Faye Richmond's session the previous October. Duplicate matrix numbers hardly troubled Davis, however, so both sets of numbers remained in the session sheets. Davis, in his notes to the original album (JD 105), mentioned "Fair Jennies Lament," just what



the name implies, written by Irene Higginbotham, a niece of the famous J.C." She also used the name Glenn Gibson and as such received credit as writer of "Feeling Sentimental," but Davis kept that information quiet. The session may not have been quite *Dixieland Heaven*—the name given by Davis to the album—but it contained well-played, workman-like Dixieland and perfectly complements the earlier sessions.

Three weeks later, to the day, Faye Richmonde returned to Mastertone Studios to cut one side of an album with the piano accompanist of the innovative and thoroughly professional Al Williams. Titles at this and the following session included Monette Moore's nearly thirty-year-old chestnut "Meat Man Pete," plus plenty of Andy Razaf tunes, including some that Betty Thornton had cut in 1946, such as "Mama's Well Has Done Gone Dry" and "If You Can't Control Your Man." She also cut the old Wingy Manone song, "Where Can I Find a Cherry for My Banana Split" and a tune from 1928, "I Ain't Your Hen, Mister Fly Rooster," actually written by Razaf and Denniker in 1927, as well as a Razaf-J. C. Johnson tune from 1932, "What's Your Price." These titles appear tame enough in the twenty-first century, but in the late 1950s Davis was clearly pushing the envelope of good taste.

The album, entitled *For Men Only*, followed the earlier pattern of a white, nude model—this one with a judiciously positioned violin. In a terse note on the rear, Davis stated that the earlier album, *A Little Spice*, brought requests for an encore and described the singer "as a native of Philadelphia, a person of charm, beauty and an outstanding artist . . . well known from coast to coast, having sung in many leading Supper Clubs and Theatres." His not-so-erotic write-up belies the undeniably attractive photograph of the artist. Davis was also perfectly content to display a photograph of his black singer on an album with a white model, as well as to retain the old show-biz British spelling of theatre. Sadly, *For Men Only*, within the year, brought him into court on a pornography indictment, which hardly seems believable in the twenty-first century.

These legal troubles, however, appeared far distant early in 1957. Clearly a competent and professional artist, Faye Richmonde completed her six songs with three-quarters of an hour of the session to spare. She came back two days later and successfully recorded six more titles. Faye received \$250.00 for her two sessions, while her pianist received \$100.00. Despite all of Davis's future problems over albums like this one, he remained meticulous with his royalty statements. In January 1963, for example, his statement showed that *For Men Only* had sold 11,500 copies, for which

Richmonde received 32 cents per album, less the initial performers' payments. Just the same, the album helped her attract a larger audience for her live performances and received an initial \$100.00 more than she had for her first long-play release. To place these payments in perspective, Richmonde earned a fractionally higher payment for her January and February 1957 sessions than Lee Castle did for all three of his. Moreover, she received subsequent royalties as well.

Here's another perspective on Davis's album issues. Although his first album, JD-101, was by Faye Richmonde, the next four consisted of an album of sax ballad instrumentals by Haywood Henry, piano solo albums by Frank Signorelli and Erskine Butterfield, and the Lee Castle jazz album. The next two albums—recorded after the February 1957 Faye Richmonde session—hit the public before Davis released her second album. Davis followed his first five with a potpourri of titles and styles. JD-106, entitled *Piano Party*, featured Joe Biviano's accordion quintet, with polkas and other titles such as "O Sole Mio" and "Ciribiribin." Davis then released an album by the James Tyler Orchestra entitled *To My Wife*, a set of ballads and sentimental instrumentals featuring a bunch of roses on the album jacket. The eighth release, the second album by Faye Richmonde, was followed by Otis Blackwell's "Singin' the Blues" and "My Honky-Tonk" by Eddie Miller. The Otis Blackwell album consisted of a very obvious compilation but its late release owed more to the pending lawsuit than to Davis's failure to appreciate potential market sales.

In late October 1956, Davis sued Otis Blackwell and a number of co-defendants for the princely sum of half a million dollars. The suit finally came to court on March 26, 1957, with Davis alleging violation of his contract, dating from September 1952. One of the defense lawyers, Lewis A. Dreyer, according to *The Billboard* of November 3, 1956, stated: "Davis himself rendered the contract void last year by failing to abide by its terms. The pact allegedly provided that Davis was to pay Blackwell \$25 a week, and also to record a minimum of 16 sides with him each year. The defense charges that he recorded considerably less than the minimum in 1955, and also that Davis made his last payment to the cleffer around June 1, 1955. In February, 1956, Blackwell claims he notified Davis of what he considered to be a breach and default." Davis retained Warren Troob, an attorney who had often acted on his behalf.

The original 1952 contract stipulated that Blackwell must record sixteen titles, "or more if desired by the company," though within no time frame. He did, of course, record sixteen titles in total for Davis's Jay-Dee label, as well

as sessions for RCA. On April 3 Davis responded to a subpoena to attend the Supreme Court of the State of New York on Manhattan's Center Street at 10:30 A.M. before Judge Saul S. Streit with the following documents:

all bank statements, including cancelled checks and stubbs, for the calendar years 1954 and 1955, relating to the checking accounts and savings accounts of Joseph M. Davis, Joe Davis Music Co., Beacon Music Co. and Caribbean Music Co., and any other recording companies or music publishing companies owned or controlled by Joseph M. Davis during the calendar years 1954 and 1955;

All books, records and statements of Joseph M. Davis or any other recording company or publishing company owned or controlled by him showing sales, expenses and receipts with respect to (a) musical compositions written by Otis Blackwell and (b) phonograph recordings embodying performances by Otis Blackwell.

It was to be a comprehensive show.

These documents provide a fascinating insight into sales and royalty payments and show that on sales of records made under the original 1952 contract, Davis owed Blackwell \$440.05, mostly on sales of "Daddy Rollin' Stone" / "Tears Tears Tears," based on sales of just over 27,000 copies, including 15,356 since February 16, 1954. In the three years to the trial, the RCA coupling of "Fool That I Be" / "Number o o o o" sold just 59. Another document cited the unreleased "I'm Travelin' On," which later came out on the JD album, plus a handwritten entry of "I Love Being in Your Arms." Another document listed a fifth title for the March 1955 recording session, which apparently never happened.

The call for up to three previous years of "cancelled checks and stubs" seemed a daunting demand, but Davis was equal to the task. He produced an itemized single sheet of payments to Blackwell from February 16, 1954, to the date of the trial, showing fifty-six checks paid to Blackwell, almost every one for \$25.00 from February 16, 1954 (the date of the renewed contract) to December 1, 1955. Only one of these checks, for \$15.00, fell below the \$25.00 limit. Four exceeded \$25.00: \$30.00 on May 10, 1954; \$100.00 on February 14, 1955; and two payments, each of \$50.00, on March 1 and March 14, 1955. Though not precisely issued once a week, they were effectively weekly. There were seven or eight (one dated June 2) later than the date reported in *The Billboard*, which cited attorney Dreyer's claim that Davis had paid nothing since "around June 1, 1955."

Thus Davis paid Blackwell just over \$1,500.00 in advances since February 1954, to say nothing of a further \$1,433.50 for four recording sessions; three for his own label and one for RCA. Offset against these combined payments to Blackwell were recording fees, artist royalties on record sales, and mechanical copyright royalties totaling a mere \$684.83. According to Davis's figures, he stood some \$2,200-odd in credit. Several years later, in an interview with Brandon Harris and Ralph M. Newman, an understandably upset Otis Blackwell recalled: "He had me under contracts as an artist and a writer. I was supposed to collect \$50.00 a week as a writer, and I don't remember how much for the other contract. I think I got two checks and from then on I got stories . . . . Later on in years I had to pay a pretty good dollar to get out from under it."

A "pretty good dollar" it was, too, though hardly the half a million for which Davis initially made claim. The court decided that Blackwell and his co-defendants should jointly pay Davis \$11,500 and that Davis owned the twenty-four titles recorded by Blackwell for Jay-Dee and RCA. The court also ruled that Blackwell received some \$1,828.62 in advance royalties against which Davis could set future payments. If insufficient royalties accrued, then Davis couldn't lay a claim against Blackwell for restitution. This ruling effectively reinforced the typical advance royalty payment against future sales and royalties accruing. Signed on April 4, 1957, by Davis, and the following day by Blackwell, this agreement cleared Davis to issue his Otis Blackwell album in an endeavor to use up some of these advance royalties held.

Blackwell's initial anger and subsequent dislike for the episode subsided over the years. A man of genuine talent in more than one field, he must have felt himself restricted by Davis's contracts, the first one having been signed by his mother, Addie. At twenty it was a great contract, but after three years of success, it must have looked different. By the time Blackwell was interviewed by German researcher Norbert Hess in 1981, his recollections had mitigated and mellowed. He spoke of Davis and himself having a few differences of opinion in 1955 and then confirmed that Davis was to have paid him a few dollars every week.

Fortunately, despite this interlude, Blackwell achieved the success that Davis had early spotted as potential. The likes of "Don't Be Cruel" and "All Shook Up" became huge hits for Elvis Presley and Blackwell achieved the fame he deserved. In the late 1980s he maintained offices at the music publishers headquarters, the Brill Building, 1619 Broadway, which had been Davis's office at one time, too. Blackwell suffered a moderate stroke in 1991

that effectively removed him from the music business and ultimately died from a 2002 heart attack.

On consecutive days in July 1957 Davis cut African American gospel titles, some running to five takes, at the Universal studios in Chicago from Dardanelle Hadley and Harold Turner, with piano, organ, celeste, and vibes in various combinations. Presumably Turner is responsible for playing most of the instruments most of the time but for some reason, Mae Chisholm's name also appears on Davis's handwritten notes. The sessions, cleared through the Chicago branch of the AFM, Local 208, paid Hadley and Turner \$165.00 each and the sessions became an album, *Hymns of Faith*.

On August 29 Davis recorded a dozen titles, including older risqué titles like "Electrician Blues" and "Shake Your Can," by New York City-based Joyce Heath, at Mastertone's studios on 8th Avenue with pianist Al Williams. Davis JD 112 *Confidential* was released as by Angelina, immediately before an album by Dardanelle Hadley. Confusingly, singer Inez "Lady" Washington, from 138th Street, New York, New York, signed with Davis that month and was credited with being the artist on this album; perhaps she is also Joyce Heath!

The role of these mildly salacious albums in Davis's current financial affairs became increasingly significant because 1957 closed with litigation over their validity with the threat of criminal proceedings. Davis, involved in the music scene in the 1920s when double entendre lyrics were commonplace, published many of the better known, such as "My Man o' War" and "My Handy Man." One copy of his 1928 Triangle sheet music for "My Handy Man," headlined as *Ethel Waters' Sensational Hit*, became "Exhibit M" in the future Queens County Court proceedings. Back in the 1920s such selections caused few eyebrows to lift in disdain, but thirty years later attitudes had changed.

Many of Davis's albums often offered little more than to make available older published songs, usually his own. Beacon LP 69 *Tit For Tat* merely reissued a dozen of Betty Thornton's from 1946, although the front photograph (with peel-off sticker to maintain modesty) was an update. The model on the sleeve of Faye Richmonde's very first album appeared even more carefully covered. In short, risqué songs had been available for a long time in one form or another, and many eminent tunesmiths like Andy Razaf wrote them. Many of these still retained the soft-option ends to reduce the impact of double entendre as in "I Ain't Got It Now," which produced lines like

I had it when I came in here this evening,  
But I ain't got it now!

Deflated by ending with a spoken, "Who took my umbrella?"

This exemplified the risqué song type heard on Davis's albums and even "Where Can I Find a Cherry" tamely added to the title "For My Banana Split." Nonetheless, the titles were changing and many moved further away from double entendres. "My Pussy Belongs to Daddy" clearly retains that element, but plenty of others lacked its edge.

From earlier sessions accompanied only by a piano, Davis eventually progressed to trios and quartets. A Vicki Ford session used a trio with guitarist Larry Lucie and by August 1963, when Davis remade Faye Richmond's "My Pussy Belongs to Daddy" and "Tony's Got Hot Nuts" (from her Davis JD 116 *Girlesque* album), Her Men of Passion included Louis Metcalfe on trumpet and guitarist Larry Lucie, backed by Abe Baker (bass), and Harlem Williams (drums). Oddly, the 45 rpm release of this coupling on Beacon is credited as "from the Davis LP *Girlesque*," but it is not; that album merely has Con Frederick on piano. However, where would American music be without the occasional Davis discographical conundrum?

Davis always used top studio models for his album sleeves, usually from Graphic House on Madison Avenue. Rowena Buttonweiser graced a number of his albums, including Faye Richmond's first and a Que album from the 1960s, *Pussy Galore*, while Paula Ushan was featured on Faye Richmond's second album with a discretely positioned violin maintaining her modesty. Shela Brett in half a swimsuit appeared on the deck of a motor launch on a Beacon album by Vicki Ford and Her Men of Passion. Other models included Nora Van Tosh, Joan Weber, Laurie Vickers, Joan Hacklin, and, most notably, Jayne Mansfield.

For whatever reasons, mid-1957 marks the start of a definite decline in the amount of Davis's output other than the risqué albums. Even then, his serious active role in music and music publishing took a marked downgrade and the only remaining session for 1957 occurred on November 14 with Mac Ceppos, another survivor of the 1920s, having played violin as early as 1925 with Al Letz's orchestra and recording through the 1930s. His accompanying orchestra included eight "front" strings as well as drummer Terry "Bunny" Snyder and the ubiquitous bassist Bob Haggart.

Davis spent a fair amount of time trying to locate the copyright ownership through the Library of Congress for "Mary Ann" (including variant spellings). Davis located sixty-two claims, the earliest from 1913. Davis

added a handwritten note “original composer of ‘Mary Ann,’ Lord Caresser Montreal Canada,” to which he’d added Lionel Belasco’s New York phone number, MO3-6348. Belasco had cowritten “Heaven Happened Tonight,” which Davis recorded from Bon Bon in 1945. Clearly his Caribbean link had not been totally severed.

### The People of the State of New York

At the end of January 1957, Faye Richmonde cut her third album, for \$300.00, at the Mastertone Studio. She recorded ten titles in an hour and three-quarters from 3:30 P.M. on Thursday, January 30, and four more the following day in three-quarters of an hour, all with Conrad Frederick on piano. It must have been so much more simple, cost effective, and potentially lucrative than cutting a vocal group session. Nonetheless, he was not quite finished with vocal groups and recorded the Naturals for a Beacon 45 in July 1957.

On February 3, 1958, Davis received a letter from the assistant district attorney of the County of New York regarding Danny Taylor. Once again the courts called Davis in to either reaffirm or establish his copyright ownership to songs: “Enclosed, herewith, please find your agreement, dated July 17, 1956, between you and Danny Taylor and the assignment dated July 12, 1956, by which you received the rights to four of Danny Taylor’s songs. As you probably know, Mr. Taylor recently pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor count in the indictment.” The songs, of course, relate to Taylor’s August 1956 session, after which Taylor exonerated Davis from any claim on “Ain’t Nothing Wrong” by one Joe Dasher, who had written in to contest ownership.

On August 18 Davis recorded a dozen titles from Nancy Steele, yet another New York singer, which became the Davis JD 118 *Play Girl* album. The titles were far more modest than had been some on the Inez Washington and Faye Richmonde albums; “The Sweater Song” and “Miss Saks Is Wearing Slacks” were two. For a session lasting just under four hours, with an unnamed pianist, she received \$250.00. Davis also retained the right to use her name and picture “in connection with the exploitation of the album,” which he accomplished on the back of the sleeve, showing her as a well-shaped lady in a black one-piece swimming costume, though she’s definitely not the lady on the front of the sleeve, on either the Davis or the Beacon reissue album. In his notes, Davis is



at great pains to stress that “the songs in this album are done in a pleasing, unoffensive manner . . . and . . . are more or less of the sophisticated type. Perhaps, a few of them may make you blush, but, anyway they are entertaining.”

The public opposition to Davis and his ilk culminated in an indictment by *The People of the State of New York* against Jack Lonshein, Joseph M. Davis, Morris A. Sulton, George Monsour, and Oscar Resnick, defendants. Davis’s last probable appearance in court occurred during March–April 1938, as a petit-juror in room 109 of New York City’s Foley Square courthouse. Davis’s lawyer, Herbert Lyon, submitted a twenty-six-page summation in plea on behalf of his client, on December 18, 1958. In it he mentions, in presentation to the court, that we “opened this case quite some time ago.” Lyon also points out that the indictment is under Section 1141 of the statute dealing with hard pornography and the objection to these Davis albums were hardly in this league.

Many prominent persons came to speak on behalf of Davis, including Gus Haenschen, “a federal prosecutor, former federal prosecutor, and a former government attorney and a present practicing attorney,” as well as an old songwriting friend from the 1920s. Mr. Lyon pointed out repeatedly that the state prosecutors had scraped the barrel in attempting to bring charges against Joe Davis. The prosecutors brought a rabbi to the witness stand to ask him if these were the sort of albums he would play for his congregation. Paula Ushan, who posed with the violin on Faye Richmonde’s *For Men Only* album also appeared on the witness stand and her presence was scathingly dismissed by Lyon: “The point is, why is she brought here? She is brought here to show that Mr. Davis took this little innocent violin player against her wishes and took her picture and put it on a phonograph record jacket, which she now disapproves of. Who is she kidding? She takes these pictures for a living. She gives a release to the fellow who takes it. She hopes somebody buys it. And when it is bought on the kind of a record that may be sold in the stores, not hidden some place, but sold openly in the stores, in A&S and Gimbels, and we will go into that, she sends out a thousand notices to her friends.” Lyon further pointed out that similar photographs were readily available “in the Cafe Paree and up and down the honky-tonks of 52nd Street, but that there was no rule during all this trial that you had to abstain from seeing any of these places.” He made great play about the detectives assigned to the case ignoring “magazines with women’s behinds sticking right into the reader’s face” in the very store that also sold albums by Davis.



In a rather convoluted manner, Lyon summed up the case in a plea to the jury:

I ask that you not allow respectable business people who have been doing things above board, who are respected members of the community about whom nobody has a bad word to say, and that you allow a man like Joe Davis, who has published and written some of our finest songs and who wrote, or rather manufactured two records, and wrote a couple of songs which are party songs, and which I respectfully submit to you were never considered crimes for the past twenty years, I say that if you want to be fair and just you cannot today say that now, without notice, without a change of the law, without new legislation, we are going to make you a criminal.

Doubtless it would have read better had it been written but it has an immediacy and he had a telling final thrust: "What happened to Gimbels? What happened to A&S? Are they too powerful?"

Mr. Lyon's plea, together with the case mounted by the other defending counsels, proved successful, and Davis returned to the studio in January 1959 to record Davis JD 119 *Para Hombres*, "the first time 'Party' songs have been written in the Spanish language to be recorded for an album." This release marked another major Davis first.

While the lawsuit progressed against Davis over his albums, he found himself chasing RCA for full payment of mechanical copyright royalties on "Save It, Pretty Mama." Beginning in May, correspondence flew back and forth between Davis and RCA, which came to a head in a letter from Davis's lawyer, Warren Troob, on October 16, 1958, to collect an underpayment of \$77.93. RCA had apparently been paying Georgia Music since March 1958 at 1 and one-half cents each on sales of some 15,000 discs. Davis had pulled out his original contract with RCA from the 1930s to show that the license fee "shall be one cent (\$0.01) per record face." As Troob put it to RCA, "both Mr. Davis and I have advised you that he would accept nothing less than the statutory royalty of 2 cents per record, and requested payment within seven days or face the necessary action claiming violation and infringement of his copyright and request (for) triple damages as well as counsel fees."

In 1959, in immediate reply to the 1958 lawsuit over his albums, Davis drew up a contract with New York singer Lana Del Rio to record over two days on January 15 and 16, 1959, once more at Mastertone's Studio on 42nd

Street. The lady on the front sleeve, in gaucho hat, high-heeled shoes, and small fan, but nothing else, was certainly more discreet than had been any on earlier albums, underscoring the trauma of the court experience. The album obviously remained around for some time as it was advertised in the February 29, 1964, *New York Revista Teatral*.

The Rayons, another vocal group, recorded at the Allegro Studios at 1650 Broadway on the day preceding the Del Rio sessions—cutting two titles for Slate Records, according to the session sheet. Whatever the outcome of the session, Davis finally released “I’m a Fugitive” and “Don’t Ever Break Your Baby’s Heart” on Davis 464. Basking in his usual glorious inconsistency, 462 had been the Naturals’ July 1958 coupling and 463 a reissue of Dean Barlow’s “True Love” and “I’ll String Along with You,” reviewed in the trade press in January 1959, but both had been on the Beacon label.

Davis completed one other vocal group session in 1959, by the Dovers. Recording at Mastertone’s studio, the quintet consisted of James Sneed, Wyndham Porter, Frank Edwards, and Charles Stapleton, with the female lead of Miriam Sneed (née Grate) with accompaniment by Everett Barksdale and Wally Richardson on guitars, bassist Al Lucas, and Bobby Donaldson (drums). “Sweet as a Flower” and “Boy in My Life” appeared on Davis 465, the penultimate issue in the exceptionally erratic 400 series, but the other two titles did not appear until several years later as New Horizon Record 501. Its president? Joe Davis, of course. The group initially signed a contract with Davis dated June 2, 1954. All five who signed the original contract (Charles Richardson, Windham Porter, Robert Johnson, James Sneed, and Edward Quinones) had someone else sign in their names, as they were then minors. Eventually the group requested a release from their contract, which Davis agreed to in January 1955, having made no recordings. Perhaps the final coupling on Davis 466 by the Continentals was also cut in 1959. Whatever the details of this final release, it marked the end of the series as Davis’s attention moved almost entirely toward albums.

In October 1959 he paid singer Dolores Spriggs \$250.00 to cut another risqué album, Davis JD 120 *Sexarama*, with vocals by “Miss Dee.” Similar Davis albums eventually appeared, though many were actually by a male vocalist with the pseudonym of Saul T. Peter. Other, earlier titles emerged in the 1960s on Beacon and Celebrity albums in anthologies of “party songs.”

Heartening support for Davis’s album releases came from his old colleague, Andy Razaf, writer of many of the titles included on the Beacon and Celebrity albums. Writing sympathetically on March 10, 1959, Razaf

said: "The material is done in good taste and is as entertaining—if not more so—as Sophie Tucker's album and the others of that type . . . Were it not for the very nude pictures on the cover, those hypocrites would have said nothing . . . You and Bert are always in my prayers."

In many ways, the end of the 1950s marked the end of Joe Davis's significant contributions to the music scene, hardly surprising for a man born who began his professional career during World War I. It's not that he moved entirely away from the music business—for almost twenty years he continued to launch new ventures. But his future contacts seemed erratic and opportunist; one suspects he no longer sought out talent but dealt with what came his way. New, fresh, and interesting opportunities occasionally presented themselves, and he sometimes he helped out old friends at a session. But the music had changed and Davis seemed less interested in these new directions. For whatever reasons, he retained far less information on his last years in the business than he had on his earlier ones.

## Chapter Twelve

# I Learned a Lesson I'll Never Forget

By the time Joe Davis began to slow down his musical career, the recording industry must have seemed in utter upheaval to a man who'd spent just over four decades in the business. The ways of doing business so familiar to Davis, such as the power of single record releases and the promotion and distribution of records, were shifting rapidly. There was also an immense boom in the industry with cinema links, record clubs, and shifts in power in the distribution business. Davis had never found it easy after the late 1940s to corner his market, any more than the other small independents, but by the mid- to late 1950s, rack-jobbing, discounting, and "one-stops" had emerged to confuse these patterns even more.

By 1960 Congress was forced into investigating the payola scandal and Davis's old plugging partner, Alan Freed, received a suspended jail sentence for accepting payment from songwriters in return for airplay. Shunned by the music business which once hankered after his plays, Freed died broke in 1965. Many of the men who helped Davis promote records, such as Pinky Vidacovich, a musician and music director of New Orleans's WWL during the 1950s, were either dying, shifting their business interests, or leaving the record business altogether. Moreover, the "first" generation of black disc jockeys who came on the air in the years after World War II and who supported the music found on independent record labels—men like Bugs Scrugs from Memphis, Sugar Daddy Birmingham from Winston-Salem, Jockey Jack Gibson in Atlanta, and Professor Bop in Shreveport—were slowly slipping away as local radio stations and their formats moved toward a more national sound and identity.

Sheet music and music publishing, the core of Davis's business before entering record production and manufacturing, barely resembled the business he initially encountered as a young man in New York City. Davis

entered the business before radio broadcasting and when blacks were largely overlooked as recording artists. At that time sheet music publishers largely aimed to sell to a market of homeowners with pianos, as did the Tin Pan Alley composers. In 1920 Pittsburgh's KDAQ pioneered commercial radio and Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" helped launch a "race record" series, two events that transformed the commercial music industry. By the time Davis's career wound down in the early 1960s, he'd lived (and worked) through changes as diverse as the tribulations of two Petrillo recording bans, the rise and evolution of regional independent record companies, and the painful and very public payola scandals.

The sound of pop music and the role of A&R men in the studios also radically changed since Davis entered the record business in the early 1920s. A&R men once ruled the studio; they brought in the songs and arranged for specific accompanists to work at each carefully timed session. But by the mid-1960s an increasing number of prominent pop music groups like the Beach Boys and the Beatles authored most of their own material, decided which instruments to use, and often wrote their own arrangements. It's little wonder that Davis quit the business when he did.

Albums now took up some 80 percent of the total dollar volume sales, with 45s accounting for the remaining 20 percent. As *Variety* for January 8, 1958, pointed out, the major labels were "running way ahead in the sales take. They've gotten their share of the pop pull and have been cleaning up with the packaged product. It's this mushrooming field, in fact, that tradesters figure may be the undoing of a lot of indie operations. After having kicked up some coin with the pop clicks, quite a few of the indies have been going for larger game in the album field. It's this splurge into the packaged food markets that's making the indies nervous. At the \$3.95 tap for a pop LP, the profit margin is pretty slim considering the rising costs in recording, art work, promotion, etc. The majors get by on sales volume, while indies, with a small LP catalog to work with, have found it tough sledding to pull their line into the profit column." Mike Gross may well have "out-Billboarded" that magazine in its own vernacular but there is no misreading his message, and there is little doubt that via whatever medium, Davis also received that same message.

In the spring of 1960 Davis contemplated an album by his old friend, Rudy Vallee, who received good reviews for his set at the Roundtable in New York, although perhaps the venue's two jazz performers (the Kai Winding Septet and Teddy Wilson) might have been more in tune with the times. By July, perhaps sensing all of the changes in popular tastes, Davis

seemed distinctly less enthusiastic but Vallee still wrote in August: "I want you to receive a cut, fee . . . I cannot have you help me without sharing in its success at no cost to you!"

At the same time Vallee found himself working on an album incorporating two 1940s radio broadcasts that he'd done for the National Dairies on the Sealtest Show, which Warner Brothers planned to release soon. By November, Vallee's direction had once more altered and he wrote:

Several days ago, I played my LP for the boys out at Crown and Cadet Records. Joe Bahari originally intended to listen for only a few minutes, but apparently he enjoyed it enough to sit through the entire forty minutes and at its conclusion, he found it more humorous than Shelly Berman. The Bahari's have several different prices, Joe Bahari felt that in [the] \$3.98 class I should take it to Liberty or Imperial Records who are going to listen to it next week, when their boys get back from Chicago . . . Bahari has a \$1.49 seller and in that class, he felt that they could sell twenty times more than any other company because they get out through Sears, drug stores, department stores, and markets untouched by \$3.98 distributors. He is very anxious to have it.

Vallee noted that he would receive, "much less in royalties" but that "a sensational hit" would propel him into the nightclubs like Shelly Berman. It is ironic that he should be asking Joe Davis for his views on which price to sell for, when he so neatly defines the reasons for Davis's slip from the music scene. Vallee, whose memorable career included an appearance in the 1968 Elvis Presley film *Live a Little, Love a Little* as well as brief stints as late as 1984 on the long-running soap opera, *Santa Barbara*, died in 1986 with his 1920s ambition to be mayor of New York sadly unfulfilled.

In September 1960 Davis heard once more from an old friend, Danny Taylor. That Taylor contacted him a mere eighteen months after Davis successfully sued him for infringement of copyright testifies to Davis's personal and professional standing in the business. He wrote: "Hi Joe . . . I'm in a little trouble Joe and maybe you can help me. Joe my bail is \$1,000 but I can get out on \$50, Joe anything you send me it would help alots, it doesnt matter what it may be . . . you might cut a few side with me again."

A year later Davis heard from yet another old friend from the 1920s, black singer-guitarist Lonnie Johnson, who'd kept his career alive in the late 1940s and early 1950s on the King label. Johnson—"rediscovered"

and recorded in 1956 for Bluesville—lived into the blues renaissance of the 1960s, which brought him tours and concert appearances. He'd just returned home to Philadelphia from a gig at the Sugar Hill Club in San Francisco when he wrote in February 1962: "Hello dear Joe . . . what have you got cooking in my line of work are you still booking club and theatre dates & recording dates . . . I have some fine LPs I would like to sell outright to you so let your old friend Lonnie Johnson know what's cooking."

Times changed, as Davis knew painfully well, and he could no longer muster a marketing strategy to sell a Lonnie Johnson album, any more than he envisioned potential sales in Danny Taylor. It's not that Davis wouldn't test the waters from time to time, as he did in 1962, with an entirely new type of sessions for him. He arranged the first for January 8 at the Belvedere studios with a projected 5:00 P.M. start as an Elmo Hope session with Paul Chambers on bass and drummer Philly Jo Jones that didn't begin until 6:30 P.M.

Modern pianist Elmo Hope, who began recording under his own name in 1953—again with Philly Jo Jones on drums—was a significant jazz name for Davis to sign. The session ran smoothly for by 8:30 P.M. they had cut nine titles, all over three and a half minutes. Two days later they augmented the initial date with three more titles, all over four minutes running time each, in a brief hour and a half session with Edward "Butch" Warren (bass) and Granville Hogan on drums accompanying Hope. Davis rushed into releasing the material—or at least six of the seven titles recorded at the first session. Celebrity LP 209, *Here's Hope*, was advertised as "The First Major Jazz Album of 1962," which might well have been true. Davis plugged it featuring the "Famous Pianist/Composer with his accompanists" including "the MILES DAVIS aggregation . . . need we say more?" Davis offered it to dealers at \$1.00 postpaid, with a \$3.98 retail price and followed with the remaining titles on Beacon LP 401, *High Hope*.

Davis listed ten other albums, almost all of them being remixes of earlier Davis sessions, to dealers at this \$1.00 price. Celebrity LPs 201 to 210, respectively, were *Family Album* (Ginny Gibson, Lennie Herman, etc.), *Mr. Honky Tonk* (Eddie Miller), *World Famous Dixieland Favorites* (Lee Castle), *World Famous Waltzes* (Joe Biviano), *World Famous Accordion Duets* (Joe Biviano, Tony Mecca), *World Famous Rhythm and Blues Groups* (mostly 1950s vocal groups), *World Famous Minstrel Show*, *World Famous Hymns* (Dardanelle), and *Here's Hope, World Famous Love Songs* (organ solos). Joe Davis looked long and hard at the new marketing strategies

needed; and joined into the hype by billing Lee Castle's album as "*without exaggeration* the greatest of all Dixieland LP albums."

While reprogramming his own selections for album release, Davis also leased material to other companies. In the fall of 1962 he leased the four titles he cut with pop and light classical pianists Ferrante and Teicher—for United States rights only—to Synthetic Plastics Record Corp., which had offices on New York's 8th Avenue, close to the old Mastertone studios. The interest in leasing Davis's material, however, didn't seem very brisk.

In October 1962 Davis recorded two quite different sessions. The first featured yet another old friend, trumpeter Taft Jordan at an early evening session at the Belvedere studios to record four all-instrumental titles by a five-piece band. The thoroughly professional rhythm section comprised Everett Barksdale and Carl Lynch on guitars, bassist Milt Hinton, with Herb Lovelle as a late replacement on drums for Joe Marshall. He released "Walkin' on Air" and "Jelly Apples" on Beacon 1000—45 rpm disc, credited, oddly, to the Patriots, but not on a Davis album.

Three weeks later, on October 25, 1962, Davis cut another album of risqué material, from singer Claudia Wheeler, which became Beacon LP 303, *The Price Is Right*. Ms. Wheeler, who lived locally at 112th Street, New York City, picked up \$200.00 for the session of fourteen titles. Davis utilized Joe Baque, who also played piano on the 1959 Dovers session. Though the market for these "party records" slowed down noticeably, the party wasn't over quite yet.

Davis cut only four sessions in 1963, two of them specifically aimed at the "party" market. He led off with a two-title pop session at the A-1 Studios on West 56th in August where he recorded "Living Doll" and "Ring-Ting" from singer Sven Svenson (aka Lenny Rogers). Despite a typical Davis rhythm section (Everett Barksdale on guitar, bassist Al Lucas, and Bobby Donaldson on drums), the titles were not memorable, although Davis clearly hoped for a topside.

Later that month came the two-title remake of Faye Richmonde's "My Pussy Belongs to Daddy" and "Tony's Got Hot Nuts." This session, in fact, simply overdubbed a four-piece band led by Larry Lucie, with tasty guitar from him on top of the original recording. Louis Metcalfe is featured playing fine muted trumpet, and listening to these sides one appreciates just how much the 1946 Betty Thornton titles would have benefited from a small combo of this quality, rather than the lackluster accompaniment provided by Bill Dillard's unit. Understandably, when Davis reprogrammed earlier



party records as Beacon LP 305, *My Pussy Belongs to Daddy*, he used this 1963 overdubbed coupling. He also produced another party album, Beacon LP 304, *Smarty Party Songs*, utilizing both the Belvedere studios and this same four-piece band.

In early October 1963 Davis signed a six-month contract with The Pag-eants, a vocal group comprising Barbara Reeves, Roy Benson, John Flores, and Melvin Riley, and one week later they cut their obligatory four titles at the Belvedere studios. Within a few months he issued "Show Them You Can Dance" and "It's Been So Long" on a silver-labeled 45 rpm disc, Beacon 559. The five-piece back-up band, led by guitarist Larry Lucie, included Bob Bushnell on bass (perhaps best known for his sessions behind bluesman Elmore James for Bobby Robinson's labels), and Sticks Evans on drums. This disc, like so many other contemporary Davis products, sold poorly.

Davis also took time for, in his words, "a 'daring' innovation," which also took a swipe at distributors. This was a marketing ploy for Beacon 555—a 45 rpm single by Dean Barlow and The Crickets' "Be Faithful," from the May 1953 session. He billed this as "a beautiful heart-appealing record," which underscores his strong sense of sentimentalism and nostalgia. An interesting insight into the music scene of the time and his interpretation of it is to be found on the disc's publicity handout: "The whole complexion of the record business this past year or two has completely changed as you know. In my opinion very few Distributors are of any real value to a Record Manufacturer. I am starting a nationwide campaign on . . . BE FAITHFUL . . . I feel confident that this record will break for a big hit and I positively will not sell Distributors around the country."

His price of 40 cents came with a 2 percent discount for payment by the tenth of the month, or 35 cents cash-with-order, both postpaid. He hedged his bets with the comment that "no order will be too small to fill" but, presumably, he didn't realize this dream. Nonetheless, it explains his own attitudes to the distribution scene and his perception of changing forces in the market.

On January 16, 1964, Davis completed a pop session at Gotham's studios on West 46th Street, New York City, with a different set of accompanying musicians: guitarist Larry Lucie, Doc Bagby on organ, and bass player Doles Dickens. Dickens served as a longtime member of the 5 Red Caps, which had helped lift Davis to record fame in the mid-1940s. The Gotham studios had probably been where the original Gotham label, operated by record storeowner and entrepreneur Sam Goody, had cut sessions, until 1948 when he sold his Gotham label to Ivin Ballen of Philadelphia.

By an even greater coincidence, while living in Philadelphia and recently released from the army, Harry "Doc" Bagby cut sessions as an accompanist (piano and organ) for Ballen's Gotham label, eventually joining Ballen's staff. *The Billboard* for May 1949 named the maestro as musical advisor to Ballen's publishing arm, Andrea Music. To stretch the coincidence even further, Doles Dickens recorded for Ballen in that same month, as well as recording as a member of Doc Bagby's orchestra backing Ballen artists like Thelma Cooper. The drummer on the Steve Clayton session cut in January 1964 for Davis was none other than Shep Shepherd, stalwart Philadelphia session drummer for Ballen, who recorded behind Earl Bostic and on Bill Doggett's massive 1956 hit, "Honky Tonk."

### Obscenity Again

In November 1964 Davis granted permission to the British Mechanical Copyright Protection Society for the translation of Jack Dupree's "Fisherman's Blues," which he first released in the early 1940s, into Finnish. This small—though thoroughly intriguing—event was eclipsed during the same month because Davis was embroiled once more in the question of obscenity and his party albums heard from the Southern District Court of New York. In their September term, 1964, Joe Davis was defendant-appellant against the United States of America in an "appeal from conviction for mailing obscene matter and mailing matter in obscene wrappers, 18 U.S.C. #1461, 1463, after a trial before Irving R. Kaufman, Circuit Judge, sitting by designation, and a jury." Obscenity issues related to party records returned with a vengeance and this time Davis lost.

During the ongoing appeal against his November 1964 obscenity conviction, Davis continued recording "party" material. On March 15, 1965, vocalist Thelma Oliver (accompanied again by Larry Lucie on guitar and Herbie Lovelle on drums) recorded the album Davis released as by "Judy Andrews," though none of the record's lyrics resembled *The Sound of Music*. Later that week he received a letter from an attaché at the Japanese Embassy in New Delhi, India, who ordered ten party albums. He must have been something of a linguist, for among his choices was the *Para Hombres* album, sung entirely in Spanish.

Davis's lawyer argued his appeal before the District Court in April 1965. After waiting for some seven months, he received the decision on December 6, 1965. Chief Judge Lumbard, supported by Circuit Judge Friendly, found

him guilty as charged, while the other circuit judge dissented. Lumbard wrote that "Davis mailed packages whose wrappings bore an obscene label advertising [the] defendant's Party records, in violation of #1463. Counts twenty-two and twenty-three charged the mailing of two obscene phonograph records, in violation of #1461, and counts six through twenty-one charged the mailing of advertising which described the means for procuring the obscene records . . . As it is not alleged that these advertisements are themselves obscene, there must be a finding that the phonograph records are obscene in order to find the advertisements violative of #1461."

Davis faced a \$1,000 fine on one count and concurrent six-month suspended sentences on the remaining counts. Presiding Judge Kaufman determined that Davis's First Amendment rights to freedom of the press and speech did not apply in this case, as the materials were obscene and hence not entitled to First Amendment protection. Davis's defense rested on the contention that the records and labels were not obscene, entitling him to First Amendment protection.

Lumbard quickly affirmed the original indictments by applying decisions in the cases of *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964) and *Roth v. United States* (1957) as to: "whether to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest." Applying further the case of *Jacobellis v. Ohio* that these records lacked "literary or scientific or artistic or any other form of social importance." Lumbard also affirmed the judgment.

Leaving alone the implications for Davis for the moment, we have all heard records without literary, scientific, artistic, or any other form of social importance every time we turn on the radio! It was an intriguing interpretation. Amazingly, Davis actually applied a small yellow "obscene label" sticker in the advertisement for Beacon 556 by Faye Richmond of "My Pussy Belongs to Daddy" and "Tony's Got Hot Nuts." Presumably the "contemporary community standards" had shifted much further to the right than in the 1920s or since Lucille Bogan recorded the bawdy "Shave 'Em Dry" in 1935.

Dissenting circuit judge Waterman wrote: "I dissent. I would reverse," providing a significant foil to Judge Lumbard's curt dismissal. His very lengthy and well-argued dissent obviously encouraged Davis to appeal to the Supreme Court, which he did the following year. Judge Waterman frankly observed that the obscene labels in question "are so cheaply repulsive that it is incredible to me that the prurience of any person would be excited from reading them or from anticipation of receipt of

the 'sexsational' records. As to the records, I must say they bored me, and whatever is meant by appealing to the 'prurient interest' neither of them did so appeal."

However, Judge Waterman's most telling comment lay in the fact that no evidence had been introduced to define these "contemporary community standards."

Davis commenced proceedings to clear his name on the very day that the Second Circuit Court affirmed his conviction and drew up a petition to the Supreme Court for a writ of certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals, Davis and his attorney, Martin Garbus of the firm of Brennan, London and Buttenwieser, took to heart Judge Waterman's dissent. In March 1965, Garbus wrote to Davis that he had spoken "to the Solicitor General's office and there is a probability they will concede that your conviction was constitutionally defective . . . I had a long discussion with Mr. Lewis of their Washington office and he said the chances are about 50/50."

So much for that, as Judge Lumbard rejected the argument that the conviction had been constitutionally defective, but with Judge Waterman's interpretation, together with Garbus's discussions with Washington, a further appeal looked obvious.

In the middle of all his legal troubles, Davis heard from at least one old friend. Charles Roisman, of Philadelphia, who had written "Fine as Wine," which Davis built into a strong seller for the Crickets in the 1950s, sent him a photograph as a postcard of Roisman holding up a glass of wine as a toast. The brief but friendly message included "thank you for the records of 'Fine As Wine' which brings back memories that bless and burn." One wonders which reissue by Davis this could have been.

His Supreme Court appeal kept Davis on edge throughout the early part of 1966. His lawyer lodged Davis's petition on February 1, a mere three days before the final possible date granted by Associate Justice John M. Harlan. As Martin Garbus pointed out, there were three other cases pending before the Court "in the obscenity area" that would most probably be decided first. He also advised that if the Court were not to hear his case at all, it would "affirm the conviction."

At this point Davis's personal/business files run out, apart from two documents. One is a sheet listing the dissenting verdicts of three justices. Justice Stewart "would grant certiorari and reverse the judgement" on the grounds that "under the First Amendment this conviction cannot stand." His reasons are based mainly on the material on one album being "almost entirely of the sounds of percussion instruments," so much so that

he thought the album—*Erotica*—“was a gross misnomer.” Stewart quoted from the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature* about the extracts of a poem featured on the other album as having “clear imagery characteristic of the Parnassian school and pure and flexible harmony of style” that might render them “immortal.” Justice Douglas joined the dissent, stating that he would reverse the decision on the basis of his opinions on *Ginzburg v. United States* and *Memoirs v. Massachusetts*. Justice Black also dissented.

Thanks to the late New Orleans music researcher and lawyer Tad Jones, full details are available of Davis’s petition for writ of certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. The petition was denied by 6 to 3 (384 US 953, 16 L ed 2nd 549, 86 S Ct 1567). Justice Stewart, dissenting, stated that “under the First Amendment this conviction cannot stand,” in contradiction to the findings of both Judge Kaufman of the district court and Judge Lumbard of the court of appeals. Thus, despite the dissenting beliefs of three Justices that certiorari should be granted and the judgment reversed, the conviction remained. There was nothing more to be done.

However, the *Miami Herald* of May 24, 1966, carried:

#### OBSCENITY LAW TEST DENIED

The Supreme Court Monday [May 23] refused to hear a case that challenges the constitutionality of federal law prohibiting the mailing of obscene material.

The paper notes that three judges would have reversed Davis’s conviction and indeed carried smiling pictures of two of them, Justices Douglas and Black. The cost to Davis for the unsuccessful appeal proved dear, making it critically important that his reduced involvement with the music scene, plus the occasional sale of material and copyrights—a negation of one inviolate rule for himself before these days—must be seen in the light of the Supreme Court’s decision. Living on Riverside Drive, too, cost plenty.

*Cashbox* for May 28, 1966, carried reviews of several releases on the Burdett label, notably by Bernie Moore, in which Davis had a business interest. In the summer, another old colleague—Haywood Henry, who had appeared on many of his 1950s R-&-B sessions—arranged to record two titles that featured himself on soprano sax; the baritone sax had been

his primary instrument on earlier sessions. Two Joe Davis tunes were recorded, "Precious One" and "Indiana Moonlight," backed by a five-piece combo, sporting three reeds. Baritone saxophone player Babe Clark appeared, along with George Dorsey, who had been on the Jump Town session in 1952, on alto sax.

The coupling—released on a Joe Davis 45, with a black-on-silver label and sporting a new, plain Joe Davis logo—appeared similar to his previous 45, by the Pageants. For a man who commenced his Jay-Dee label with 777 (an undeniably lucky number), his choice of release numbers might be most instructive, depending on how much one chooses to read into it. The Haywood Henry Sextet coupling was released on Joe Davis 7120, while the previous release with this issue number had been his 5 Red Caps' hit, "I Learned a Lesson I'll Never Forget" backed by "Words Can't Explain." Perhaps this is Davis's comment upon the Supreme Court ruling.

In keeping with the times, Davis used a 7" flier enclosed with every release, with a fine, posed shot of Henry with clarinet, flute, and soprano sax framing him kneeling, holding his baritone sax on one side and a Davis-penned write-up of Henry on the reverse, signed "gratefully, Joe Davis."

The only dateable entry from 1966 in Davis's files is a letter from a very old associate, from the Ajax days of the 1920s. Elmer Snowden wrote to Davis in September confirming that his Nest Club band of about September 1924 with Mamie Smith was on Ajax 17058, and that "Lindbergh Hop," by Te Roy Williams's band on Harmony 439-H, was actually written by Snowden and Ted Nixon (*sic*). Nixon, like Williams, played trombone.

Precisely why Snowden wrote to Davis confirming this information remains unclear, but perhaps some researcher was trying to determine personnel of these early sides. Canadian Jim Kidd was involved in researching the Ajax catalogue and recorded Louis Hooper, Snowden's pianist colleague from those days, in May 1967. Len Kunstadt of *Record Research* magazine frequently re-checked personnel on early jazz records, most often for his history of jazz in New York. Kunstadt also interviewed Joe Davis. Davis's photograph of Elmer Snowden, presented to him after Snowden's "rediscovery," was autographed "To My First Boss Joe Davis."

His files also contain a copy of a letter from John Hammond of Columbia Records, dated December 2, 1962, written to one Jack Smith of Scranton, Pennsylvania, which Snowden presumably presented to Davis. In it Hammond states that Snowden "was the greatest banjo player I ever heard and there are, fortunately, a few recordings to prove it. Back in 1930 he made some records on the Bluebird label, with a group called the 'Sepia

Serenaders,' which are absolutely unique as far as the art of the banjo is concerned." Hammond also opined that Snowden's band of 1931–1932 at Small's Paradise "actually outswung Henderson's," so that it "was a tragedy that the band never recorded." Hammond ends with "I would do anything I can do to promote him today," which is probably why Jack Smith had written him. Doubtless Joe Davis would have echoed those words.

Undeterred completely by the obscenity indictment against him, Davis returned to the studios in mid-January 1968 to record thirteen titles from vocalist Julia Gardner at the Variety studios, farther down the street from the Gotham studios on West 46th, New York City. Pianist Milt Robinson provided Ms. Gardner's only accompaniment. This, his final new party album, appeared on the Que label. Subtly titled *Instant Sex*, with a well-endowed model on the sleeve, it included such non-double entendre titles as "I Blew Louie in St. Louis" and "Keep Your Knees Together Daughter."

Around this time Davis began selling off more material from his catalogue. In June 1968, for example, he received a contract from Prestige to sell his six masters of the Quintet of Hot Club of France, with Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelly, for \$500.00. Six months later Steve LaVere, then reissue coordinator of Imperial Records, wrote inquiring about Jack Dupree and Gabriel Brown masters for reissue. Ultimately nothing came of this request, but in the mid-1970s a small British label illegally released sixteen of the Gabriel Brown titles. These selections remained bootlegged until 1981, when Flyright Records in England released an album of Gabriel Brown material. This deal provided the first hint that there was much more to Joe Davis than people had appreciated and helped to launch the writing of this book. Sadly, by that date, Davis was dead.

In March 1969 Svenska Filminstitutets Filmskola of Stockholm sent an enquiry requesting permission to use "Alligator Blues" by Spencer Williams in an educational motion picture for European release only. What became of this request remains unknown. It is clear, however, that Joe Davis's days in the music and record business were close to the end.

Only two other items from 1969 remained in his files; his Connecticut car license plate (a personalized "JOED") and a letter from blues researcher Mike Leadbitter, asking for help on photographs and information on then-unknown, and largely underappreciated, New York bluesmen Gabriel Brown, Big Chief Ellis, and Sonny Boy and Lonnie. At a time when remarkably few people were interested in such postwar bluesmen, especially those in New York City, Mike Leadbitter sought biographical and



discographical information. It is instructive that he knew to ask Joe Davis. Who else, besides Len Kunstadt, bothered to make such inquiries?

An abortive sale of nine of his party albums, including Faye Richmond's *For Men Only*, seemed like much-needed good news in 1970, but the deal fell through because of nonpayment by the second party. This left Davis with plenty of erotic material that he wished to sell, though buyers proved elusive or unable to pay for them. The music found on the records in this aborted deal seems rather tame in light of truly licentious, often incendiary, live performances by contemporary artists like Jimi Hendrix. Within several months of Davis's failed attempt to complete the sale of these party albums, Hendrix also died.

In June 1971 he paid Larry Lucie \$200.00 to write six arrangements for jazz pianist and bandleader Sam Wooding. Lucie sometimes helped Davis with sessions in the 1960s and had even cut a 45 rpm single himself, which Davis had recorded at the Abtone studios. "Preston Mash" and "The Kangaroo" probably sold well enough in Lucie's gigs, but contain little of lasting musical interest. The Sam Wooding session took place on September 28, 1971, at Sound Center studios on 8th Avenue. Vocalist Rae Harrison arrived by 2:00 P.M. followed by the band around 4:25 P.M. for a two-hour session that yielded four titles, which Davis mixed down two weeks later.

These sides were intended for release on Sam Wooding's Gemini label with credits to Rae Harrison and 3 Gems, accompanied by the Larry Lucie Orchestra. Wooding took the writing credit on all four titles and initially released "Make Happiness Your Goal" and "Me Too" (Gemini 401), while "Love Me" and "Git Wid It" found life as Gemini 400. The former release included a paper sleeve with a photograph of Rae Harrison on the front and short biographies of the vocalist and Sam Wooding on the reverse.

Larry Lucie gathered a few long-standing Joe Davis session men for this 1971 date: trumpeter Louis Metcalfe and drummer Earl Williams had been among "The Men of Passion" on some of Davis's overdubs of risqué material, while pianist Ernie Hayes appeared on several 1950s R&B sessions. Sam Wooding may be best known for his obscure recordings made in Europe in the 1920s and in Paris in 1931, with such fine jazzmen as Tommy Ladnier, Doc Cheatham, Al Wynn, Gene Sedric, and Freddy Johnson. Not surprisingly, Wooding and Davis go back to the early 1920s, before he left for Europe; for in 1923 Davis published "Better Give Your Sweetie What She Needs," partly written by Wooding. Quite probably Davis knew him from the period when Wooding took his own band into the Nest Club in New York.



In the early part of 1971 the utterly obscure Wayne Kelly released a 45 rpm disc, Kelway 101, coupling two unissued Joe Davis titles from 1953; the Sparrows' "I'm Gonna Do That Woman In" is backed by an unissued take of the Blenders' "Don't Play Around with Love." On the Kelway issue this was titled "Don't ?(!)? Around with Love" for the good reason that the group substituted "fuck" for "play." Davis eventually learned of this and, accepting that the disc was already a fact, plumped for a slice of the receipts, rather than try to suppress it. He drew up a contract signed by one Joe Rocco, which read, in part: "For and in consideration of value received, I hereby grant you permission to sell 250 45 RPM records under the label named 'KELWAY' which was illegally reproduced by Wayne Kelly of the compositions entitled: DON'T PLAY AROUND WITH LOVE and I'M GONNA DO THAT WOMAN IN . . . I am the owner of the masters and control all rights to the masters etc."

It is small wonder that the Kelway release remains a scarce item, even though the Blenders title became more readily available in 1973, when Davis marketed a single-sided "collectors item" for \$1.00 of "Don't Fuck Around with Love" on Davis 1973. Within a decade of the Supreme Court ruling that the Faye Richmonde sticker was obscene, Davis could send out publicity sheets with the word *fuck* in two-inch high letters! The times certainly changed quickly.

By 1972 Davis's high overheads on his Riverside Drive home compelled him to try for a 45 single hit release. This venture perhaps prompted an attempt to promote his old ballad, "Truthfully," again and suggested his issuance of the "dirty" Blenders selection later. "Truthfully" by Bon Bon saw great success almost thirty years before but the version chosen this time was that by the Deep River Boys, recorded in 1951. "Now at the age of 80," wrote Davis in his publicity sheet, "I feel the song can be a big hit." Davis's enthusiasm for "Truthfully" seemed utterly misplaced and in the early 1970s the song was unlikely to be a hit—and it patently was not.

Davis's wife, Bertha, died on March 1, 1973, and almost two years later to the day, his older daughter, Jewel, died, leaving just his daughter Lucille. Joe Davis remained in New York City, trying to make a living in a city without much interest in the music that he recorded and published and without much of his immediate family left.

Davis seemed to re-release one 45 rpm single each year, and for 1974 he chose once again to release and re-market the Enyatta Holta topical, often-biting "Mr. Black Man." By May, Davis began shipping the new release,

Davis 799, to radio stations and noted persons. Perhaps he felt that with heightened black awareness, this quite remarkable song stood a chance of success, or perhaps LaVerne Holt contacted him once more—he remained on Riverside Drive for decades—as she had promised, once she had sorted out her life.

Clearly upset by the Watergate scandal, Davis updated an older song he cowrote with Jack Betzner, “Get Out of the Kitchen If You Can’t Stand the Heat:”

So, You’re Gonna Keep The Tapes And Papers Too;  
And You Say, The House And Senate Can Go Screw;  
So, We’ll Just Say This To You, And We’ll Repeat;  
Get Out Of The White House, If You Can’t Stand The Heat.

This interesting topical song, unfortunately, didn’t provide Davis with the hit he’d hoped for.

Music publishing royalties, however, continued trickling in from unlikely sources. One such payment in 1975, as mentioned earlier, was for \$84.60 from the Netherlands—and no mean fee at that—on the publishing for “Quizas, Quizas, Quizas,” his old Caribbean Music hit in Spanish. But the occasional music publishing royalty didn’t provide a steady, dependable enough income to provide the octogenarian businessman with much of a living.

Joe Davis remained in touch with the black music collector scene by subscribing to the English magazine *Blues Unlimited* in January 1977. Ironically, *Blues Unlimited* carried an item about the illegal English album release of Gabriel Brown, which he successfully caused to be withdrawn, and the metalwork destroyed. On February 14, 1977, he wrote that he “was releasing an LP by Dean Barlow and the Crickets recorded by me in the early fifties . . . in about four weeks.”

On October 15 of that year, he presented part of a program celebrating “100 Years of Recorded Sound,” at the Edison National Historical Site in New Jersey. Some forty musical selections had been arranged, mostly from Edison material, but item 32 on the agenda was Joe Davis’s Harmony 443-H 78 rpm version of “Me and My Shadow.” Item 33 simply read “Joe Davis, song publisher.” It must have been something of a nostalgia trip for Davis, as there were many recorded examples of his musical acquaintances, among them Vernon Dalhart, Nat Shilkret, Rudy Wiedoeft, Irving Kaufman, and Sissle and Blake. The final selections were by Roy Smeck.

During 1977 Davis also pushed a ballad he'd written in 1939, on which the copyright had been renewed in 1967, "I'll Dance at Your Wedding." This time he released it on his Davis label by a black female singer, Lady Halique, which appears to be her true name. He sent out a flier in his old style, with a cartoon of himself, balding, smiling, and on bended knee, pleading that it be played. His sense of humor had not deserted him but perhaps his memory had. In 1948 he had written to Hal Moore, author of "Sleepy-Time in Caroline," observing that "waltzes are very hard to break . . . Unless a freak record breaks through . . . a waltz is the hardest thing to put over." It is hard to imagine a more true statement.

In March 1978 Davis replied to a question from Bernie Brightman of Stash Records: "Hazel Meyers was one of a dozen artists that recorded under my supervision for practically all the record companies, but Victor. Miss Meyers recorded for me on the Ajax, Edison, Crown and other labels." This simple statement shows us just how much we have lost by not having a thorough, detailed interview with Davis about his early years with blues artists. His reference to "a dozen artists" is probably conservative, and he seriously meant "under his supervision," because of his work as an A&R man for Ajax. Presumably he acted in this capacity for some of the smaller companies, too. Again Davis points out that Miss Meyers—note the correctness of that—recorded "for" him. He also specifies the companies for whom she recorded; Ajax is fair enough, as she recorded almost as many titles for that company as she did for all others combined. Perhaps the pseudonym-hunters might eventually prove that he's correct; however, no evidence exists that she recorded for Edison or for Crown.

In April 1978 he received a royalty statement from Milestone Records for the lease of his four Coleman Hawkins titles from 1944. In the final quarter of 1977, Davis received a total of \$16.00 on sales of 400 albums, not enough to maintain him on Riverside Drive. Thelonious Monk's first commercial session, it seems, failed to make a very marked impression on the buying public in 1977. Later that year Davis tried one final time to penetrate the singles market with his ballads. This time he promoted "The Bridal Waltz" and "Down Memory Lane with You," but his new hit never arrived.

On September 3, 1978, he died in Louisville, Kentucky, where he stayed with his daughter Lucille. His ashes were scattered on the Connecticut lake close to where his wife was buried, and alongside which they had lived for so many years. Davis died just short of his eighty-second birthday, after some sixty years in the music business.

## In Retrospect

It would strain credulity to suggest that Joe Davis changed the course of American music in the twentieth century. But it's utterly fair to characterize Davis at the center of recording and promoting a wide variety of American music—most notably blues, country, pop, and swing-oriented jazz—between 1920 and 1960 from his New York City base of operations. Long before the civil rights movement, his musical legacy also routinely crossed racial lines and African Americans, such as Lonnie Johnson and W. C. Handy, comprised many of his long-standing friends and business associates.

Davis often lived comfortably from his music businesses, though he sometimes struggled, especially after 1960. He didn't back down from controversies, particularly regarding the legal entanglements related to the party records he issued in the 1950s. His generation of music entrepreneurs thought little of copyrighting material that previously—and often, justly—belonged in the public domain. The song publishing business perhaps brought Davis the most criticism, if not in his own time. He paid royalties (not consistent with all music publishers) and big sellers brought good profits, but as any record producer knows, there is no one available to assist financially on poor sellers. Critics never mention this. His generation of music entrepreneurs thought little of copyrighting material that previously belonged in the public domain. The genres included blues, cowboy songs, and folk material, which he sometimes copyrighted himself, often using pseudonyms. Level criticism here if you will but could this have been, at least on occasion, to avoid someone else doing exactly the same and claiming from him?

Davis learned from the time he entered the business in his teens that copyright and its enforcement begat money, hence the original title of this book, *Never Sell a Copyright*.

While the life and impact of Sun Record company founder Sam Phillips (a particularly intriguing and widely recognized figure), is well documented, American music scholars continue struggling to understand and appreciate fully the role played by Davis and others, such as Eli Oberstein and Ralph Peer, in shaping the sound of American vernacular music up through the mid-twentieth century as well as the ways in which they shaped the commercial phonograph industry. Their tendrils in the music businesses, which ranged from publishing sheet music to arranging and overseeing recording sessions, in many ways mirrored Davis. The journalist

and music historian Barry Mazor (author of *Meeting Jimmie Rodgers—How America's Original Roots Music Hero Changed the Pop Sounds of a Century* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2009]) is currently at work on a full-length biography of Ralph S. Peer. Oberstein, sadly overlooked, also richly deserves a book-length study.

Such much-needed research, along with this new version of Joe Davis's story, help to provide us with a richer picture of how these individuals worked. Just as Davis faced a highly volatile and rapidly changing world as he slipped away from the music business in the 1960s, the twenty-first century provides us with similar fundamental shifts in business practices and technology. But in a world dominated by digital downloads, casual attitudes toward copyright, and the "pirating" of sound recordings, it is important to understand how Joe Davis helped to create an industry that he would barely recognize today.

# Tune Title Index

- "African Echoes," 221
- "African Ripples," 71, 79
- "After You've Gone," 60, 81, 90, 134
- "Ain't Nothing with (This) World, It's  
Just the People," 271
- "Ain't Nothing Wrong," 282
- "Air Raid Warden's Siren, The," 112
- "Alabama Blues," 213, 246–47
- "Alberta," 82
- "Alberta Blues," 107
- "All Day Long," 51
- "All Shook Up," 279
- "All the Girls Like Big Dick," 27
- "Alligator Blues," 46, 298
- "Alligator Crawl," 43, 46–47, 79
- "Always," 272
- "Am I Dreaming," 92, 94
- "Am I On," 88
- "Antiquated Mama," 91
- "Apple Honey," 145
- "Are You Looking for a Sweetheart," 245
- "Arizona Blues," 74
- "As God Is My Judge," 263
- "Asbestos," 46
- "Ashes in My Whiskey," 196
- "Atlanta G.A.," 175
- "Atlanta Gal," 58
- "Atlanta Rag," 161
- "Avalon," 148
- "Baby Grice Blues," 42
- "Baby's Got the Blues, 17–18
- "Back Talk," 165
- "Back Where We Started," 64
- "Bad Time Blues," 49
- "Ballin' the Jack," 9
- "Bantu Baby," 64
- "Bar and Grill Blues," 232
- "Basin Street Blues," 58, 90, 92, 94, 134
- "Basin Street Boogie," 132, 213
- "Bass Habits," 91
- "Battleship Kate," 25
- "Be Faithful," 252, 292
- "Be Modern," 65
- "Be Ready," 75
- "Beale Street Blues," 151
- "Beau-Koo-Jack," 59
- "Bed Bug Blues," 229
- "Beedle Um Bum," 150
- "Before This Time," 171
- "Behavin' Myself for You," 151
- "Bessemer, Alabama Blues," 213
- "Best Friend Blues," 43
- "Better Get Wise with Yourself," 235
- "Better Give Your Sweetie What She  
Needs," 299
- "Big Legged Mama," 177, 210
- "Big Wind," 231
- "Bile Dem Cabbage Down," 123
- "Bird Brain," 165
- "Birmingham Special," 228, 251
- "Bitter Feeling Blues," 29
- "Black Cat Blues," 39
- "Black Cherry Blossom," 82
- "Black Hearse Blues," 29
- "Black Horse Stomp," 42
- "Black Jack Blues," 127
- "Black Man's Lullaby," 95
- "Black Maria's Blues," 165, 167
- "Black Out Blues," 117
- "Black Skunk Blues," 49
- "Black Snake Blues," 41, 52
- "Black Woman's Blues," 45
- "Blackberry Blossom," 82
- "Blackberry Jam," 106–7, 124, 141, 268
- "Blackout Blues," 120

- "Blow Hard," 255
- "Blowin' Off Steam," 40
- "Blue Danube," 212–13
- "Blue Danube Waltz," 212
- "Blue Feeling, A," 47
- "Blue Fog," 245
- "Blue Turning Gray over You," 64, 90, 94
- "Blueberry Hill," 268
- "Blues at Midnight," 196
- "Blues Boogie," 122
- "Blues on the Bayou," 154
- "Blues on the Delta," 135, 139, 154
- "Body and Soul," 46, 156
- "Bonnie's Boogie," 186, 269
- "Boog It," 149
- "Boogie Beat'll Getcha If You Don't Watch Out, The," 157, 174
- "Boogie De Concerto," 124
- "Boogie Express," 122, 132, 139, 154, 221, 228
- "Boogie in C," 122
- "Boogie on the Volga," 132
- "Boogie Serenade," 132
- "Boogie Woogie Ball," 134, 157, 267–68
- "Boogie Woogie Barcarolle," 140
- "Boogie Woogie Guitar," 164
- "Boogie Woogie Train," 178
- "Bottle's Empty, The," 159
- "Boy from Dixie, The," 11
- "Boy in My Life," 285
- "Bread a'n Gravy," 189
- "Breakin' the Ice," 78
- "Bridal Waltz," 205, 302
- "Bring Back Your Love to Me," 6
- "Broke But Happy," 135, 139, 154
- "Brother Ben," 266
- "Brown Sugar," 28
- "Buffalo Blues," 50
- "By the Calm Lagoon," 82
- "Calalu Blues," 27–28
- "California Blossom," 9
- "California Desert Blues," 80
- "Call of the Freaks," 75
- "Canal Street Boogie Woogie," 124
- "Can't Get Along with You," 196
- "Can't Stand It Any Longer," 263
- "Can't You Take a Little Joke," 97
- "Carnival of Venice," 150
- "Carolina Blues," 10, 14, 73
- "Carolina Cabin Home," 73
- "Carolina Lullaby," 73
- "Carolina Lou," 73
- "Carolina Shout," 29
- "Carolina Smiles," 73
- "Carolina Stomp," 29, 31, 42, 73
- "Carpenter," 196
- "Carrying the Boogie Blues," 131
- "Casa Loma Stomp," 71, 74
- "Center Street Blues," 32
- "Chamberlain and Lindy (Our Hats Off to You)," 44
- "Charleston Stomp," 43
- "Chattanooga Blues," 102
- "Chief De Soto," 86, 90
- "Children Walk with Me," 72
- "Chimes Blues," 161
- "Chimes of Hawaii," 73, 82
- "Chimes of Honolulu," 73
- "China Jumps," 107
- "Chinaman's Breakdown," 77
- "Chinese Boogie," 124
- "Chocolate," 102, 124, 141, 268
- "Chris and His Gang," 94
- "Christopher Columbus," 85–87, 89–90, 93–94
- "Ciribiribin," 277
- "Clang-A-Lang," 179
- "Clank A Lanka," 179
- "Clothes Line," 79
- "Clyde Barrow & Bonnie Parker," 78
- "Cobra and the Flute," 81
- "Coffee Blues," 232
- "Cold Mama," 227
- "Cold Wave Blues," 49
- "Cold Weather Papa," 30
- "Cold Winter Papa," 117
- "Colorado Blues," 74
- "Come and Get It," 149, 187
- "Come Back to Me," 242
- "Come Back to Sorrento," 187, 213

- "Confession," 180  
 "Confession Is Good for the Soul," 151  
 "Confused," 177  
 "Connie's Hot Chocolate," 82  
 "Cool Off," 56  
 "Cool Off, Cool Off," 251  
 "Copyin' Louis," 67  
 "Corn Bread Blues," 46  
 "Cow Cow Boogie," 161  
 "Crazy Blues," 288  
 "Crazy Fingers," 91  
 "Cripple Creek," 123  
 "Cryin' the Boogie Woogie," 139  
 "Crystal Gazin' Mama," 164  
 "Cuando Estas A Mi Lado," 175, 179–80  
 "Curfew Time in Harlem," 95  
 "Cu-Tu-Gu-Ru," 180  
  
 "Daddy, Your Mama Is Lonesome for You," 29  
 "Daddy Daddy," 167  
 "Daddy Rolling Stone," 243, 269, 271, 278  
 "Daddy's Little Boy," 212, 215, 248  
 "Daddy's Little Girl," 209, 211–12, 214–15, 241, 248  
 "Dakota Land," 74  
 "Dallas Blues," 56, 69–70, 87  
 "Dance & Be Merry," 222  
 "Darkies Have Music in Their Souls," 83  
 "Darky-Ology," 48  
 "De Clouds Am Gwine Roll Away," 27  
 "Dear Santa, Bring My Daddy Back to Me," 241  
 "Death of Floyd Bennett," 59  
 "Deep Forest," 75, 81  
 "Dee-Tees," 165  
 "Delta Bound," 77  
 "Dentist Song, The," 102, 182  
 "Diana!," 257  
 "Dinah," 148  
 "Dip Your Brush in the Sunshine," 71  
 "Dixie Joe," 74  
 "Dixie Shadows," 74  
 "Dixieland Mambo," 251  
 "Dizzy Glide," 81  
  
 "Doctor Blues," 66  
 "Dodging a Divorcee," 75  
 "Don't? (!)?(!) Around with Love," 239  
 "Don't Be Cruel," 273, 279  
 "Don't Come Crying to Me," 169  
 "Don't Ever Break Your Baby's Heart," 285  
 "Don't Fool with Me," 232  
 "Don't Fuck Around with Love," 242, 300  
 "Don't Go Back on Your Word," 207  
 "Don't Leave Me Baby," 256  
 "Don't Play Around with Love," 239, 241, 254, 300  
 "Don't Say We're Thru," 133  
 "Don't Stop Now," 119–21  
 "Don't the Clouds Look Lonesome," 196  
 "Don't Turn Your Back on Me," 226  
 "Don't Worry about It," 164  
 "Don't You Dare Call Me Darling," 139  
 "Don't You Ever Let Me Go," 254  
 "Down Hawaii Way," 27  
 "Down Home Blues," xviii  
 "Down Home Rag," 5  
 "Down in Honky Tonk Town," 10  
 "Down Memory Lane with You," 302  
 "Down Where the Old Road Turns," 4, 74  
 "Draggin' My Heart Around," 96  
 "Dream Street," 228  
 "Dream Time," 140  
 "Dreaming and Dreaming," 262  
 "Dreaming Blues," 9  
 "Dreams and Wishes," 240  
 "Dreamy Housatonic," 178, 217  
 "Drifting on a Reed," 146, 189  
 "Dusky Stevedore," 50–51, 55  
 "Dust Pan," 188  
  
 "Easter Bunny Day," 217, 234  
 "Easy Baby," 262  
 "Eat 'Em Up," 226  
 "Eatin' and Sleepin' Blues," 237  
 "Education Blues," 127  
 "Eel, The," 74  
 "Effervescent," 79, 90  
 "18th Street Stomp," 42



- "18th Street Strut," 39  
 "Eighty-Eight Keys to Brooklyn," 186, 269, 271  
 "Electrician Blues," 72, 76, 280  
 "Elevator Papa, Switchboard Mama," 97  
 "Eleven Cent Cotton," 59  
 "Empty House Blues," 59  
 "Endurance Stomp," 130  
 "Erin Go Boogie," 132, 139, 154  
 "Everlasting Love," 262  
 "Every Man for Himself," 146  
 "Everybody Does It Now," 46  
 "Everybody's Home Town," 90  
 "Everyone Needs Someone," 217, 245  
 "Ev'ry Little Piggy's Got a Tail," 217, 234  
  
 "Fair Jennie's Lament," 213, 275  
 "Fallin' Rain," 100, 196  
 "Falling Castles," 107  
 "Fantasy in Blue," 122, 140  
 "Fat Mama Blues," 229-30  
 "Fat Man, The," 170  
 "Fat Meat Is Good Meat," 113-14, 122, 200  
 "F.D.R. Blues," 160, 171  
 "Feel Myself Sinkin' Down," 196-97  
 "Feelin' the Spirit," 58  
 "Feeling Sentimental," 222, 241, 275  
 "Fickle Mama Blues," 46  
 "Fiddler's Dream," 82  
 "Find Out What They Like (And How They Like It)," 80, 102, 182, 192  
 "Fine as Wine," 220-21, 225, 235, 241, 295  
 "Fireside Fantasy," 269  
 "Fish Bait," 255  
 "Fisherman's Blues," 293  
 "Fives, The," 19  
 "Flight of the Bumblebee," 150  
 "Flip Flop," 255  
 "Flitin' the Mosquito," 124  
 "Florida Stomp," 30  
 "Flyin' with the King," 231  
 "Flying Hawk," 146, 189  
 "Flying Sausages," 222  
 "Foo-Gee," 107, 267-68  
 "For Lovers Only," 159  
  
 "For My Banana Slip," 281  
 "For You I Have Eyes," 230  
 "Forever," 256  
 "Forever I Vow," 266  
 "Fortune Teller Blues," 41  
 "400 Ounces," 159  
 "Four or Five Times," 149  
 "Fowler's Hot Strut," 45  
  
 "Gabriel's Band," 155, 207  
 "Garden of Weeds," 75  
 "Garlic Blues," 46  
 "Georgia," 144  
 "Georgia Bound," 73  
 "Georgia Gal," 166  
 "Georgia Gigolo," 32, 56, 73, 90  
 "Georgia May," 73, 79  
 "Georgia Rockin' Chair," 73  
 "Get Cannibal," 71  
 "Get It Fixed," 32  
 "Get Off That Kick," 142, 154  
 "Get Out of the Kitchen If You Can't Stand the Heat," 301  
 "Get Right with God," 247  
 "Get Wid It," 299  
 "Get Your Mind Out the Gutter," 59  
 "Get Yourself a Monkey Man," 28  
 "Gin Mill Sal," 170  
 "Give Me Central," 209, 232  
 "Glory," 72, 74  
 "Glutton for Love, A," 64  
 "Go Back Where You Stayed Last Night," 39  
 "Go Harlem," 64, 91  
 "God Bless Our New President," 160, 171  
 "Goin' Nowhere Fast," 186, 269  
 "Going My Way," 127  
 "Good Feelin' Blues," 52  
 "Good for Nothin'," 64  
 "Good Man Is Hard to Find, A," 42, 51, 56  
 "Good Time Mama," 46  
 "Good Times Ball," 22  
 "Goopher Dust Blues," 45  
 "G.R. Blues," 157  
 "G.R. Boogie," 157

- "Grand Central Station," 126  
 "Grand Terrace Swing," 86  
 "Great Pretender, The," 268  
 "Grievin' Mama Blues," 45  
 "Grotesque," 91  
 "Gulf Coast Blues," 18  
  
 "Ham and Eggs," 50  
 "Hand Me Down My Walking Cane," 53  
 "Handy Andy," 182  
 "Happy Feeling," 102  
 "Hard Working Woman Blues," 178  
 "Have a Heart for Someone Who Has a  
     Heart for You," 177  
 "Havin' a Ball," 91  
 "Hawaiian Kisses," 73  
 "Hawaiian Love Song," 88  
 "Hawaiian Lullaby," 67  
 "Hawaiian Star-Light," 73  
 "Heading for Hallelujah," 188  
 "Heart of Stone," 71  
 "Heater," 257  
 "Heaven Happened Tonight," 282  
 "Heavy Heart," 218  
 "Here I Am," 249  
 "Heroes of Pearl Harbor," 107  
 "He's a Son of the South," 74, 75  
 "He's Got Plenty on the Ball," 229  
 "He's My Man," 42  
 "He's My Man, He's Your Man," xviii  
 "He's My Man o' War," 185  
 "He's Never Going to Throw Me Down,"  
     22, 28  
 "He's the Commander in Chief of My  
     Heart," 113–14  
 "Hey!," 242  
 "Hi Ya Honey," 263  
 "Higginbotham Blues," 66  
 "High, High, High," 221  
 "High Brown," 77  
 "High Water Blues," 46  
 "Hills of Tennessee," 74  
 "Hit Me But Don't Quit Me," 29  
 "Hold Me Baby," 210, 241  
 "Hold That Train," 164  
 "Home Cookin'," 74  
  
 "Home Fries," 255  
 "Homeless on the Range," 124  
 "Honey in the Bee Ball," 103  
 "Honky Talk Train Blues," 149  
 "Honky Tonk," 268, 293  
 "Honolulu Sweetheart of Mine," 27  
 "Hop Scotch," 124  
 "Hopeless Love Affair, A," 102  
 "Hot Coffee," 42  
 "Hot Town Blues," 29  
 "Hound Dog," 273  
 "House Party Stomp," 43  
 "How Can I with You in My Heart," 102  
 "How Can You Face Me," 71–72  
 "How Long Must I Wait for You," 62  
 "How Sentimental Can I Get," 249  
 "How Ya Baby," 102  
 "Hymn to Darkness, A," 75  
  
 "I Ain't Afraid of Nutin' Dat's Alive," 11  
 "I Ain't Been a Preacher All My Life," 16  
 "I Ain't Got It Now," 280  
 "I Ain't Got Nobody," 25, 32, 42–43, 45,  
     47, 50–51, 55, 89, 95, 134  
 "I Ain't Your Hen, Mr. Fly Rooster," 83,  
     276  
 "I Blew Louie in St. Louis," 298  
 "I Can Tell by the Way You Smell," 196  
 "I Can't Get Enough," 120  
 "I Can't Give You Anything But Love,"  
     55  
 "I Can't Last Long," 210–11  
 "I Carry the Torch for You," 151  
 "I Didn't Mean to Be Mean to You," 133  
 "I Don't Know Why," 100–101  
 "I Don't Want to Forget," 37–38  
 "I Face This World," 249  
 "I Get Evil When My Love Comes  
     Down," 127  
 "I Got a Letter," 236–37  
 "I Just Made Up with That Old Gal of  
     Mine," 90  
 "I Learned a Lesson I'll Never Forget,"  
     137, 142, 178, 206, 297  
 "I Like It 'Cause I Love It," 136  
 "I Like Mountain Music," 78

- "I Love an Old Fashioned Love Song," 175  
 "I Love to Ride," 238–39  
 "I Love You Just the Same," 154  
 "I May Forgive, But How Can I Forget," 177  
 "I Need Some Lovin'," 46  
 "I Never Slept a Wink Last Night," 78  
 "I Prayed, I Prayed," 247  
 "I Still Care," 253  
 "I Think You Need a Shot," 100  
 "I Wanna Jazz," 24  
 "I Want to Be Loved by You (But Only You)," 115  
 "I Want to Jazz Some More," xviii  
 "I Was a Fool to Let You Go," 133  
 "I Was a Fool to Love You," 253  
 "I Went for a Walk in Oconomowoc," 214–15  
 "I Wish I Had Someone to Call Me Baby," 71  
 "I Would Do Anything for You," 81  
 "I'd Rather Be Alone," 77  
 "Ida Red," 123, 166, 171  
 "If I Can't Sell It, I'll Keep Sittin' on It," 80, 148 182  
 "If I Don't Care," 99  
 "If I Lose, Let Me Lose," 29  
 "If I'm in the Way," 177  
 "If Things Don't Get Better," 171  
 "If You Can't Control Your Man," 102, 187, 192, 276  
 "If You Can't Enlist, Buy a Victory Bond," 5  
 "If You Can't Take Five Take Two," 81, 169  
 "If You Play You Must Pay," 257  
 "If You Would Say I Love You," 55  
 "I'll Cry No More," 230  
 "I'll Dance at Your Wedding," 302  
 "I'll Keep Sitting on It," 192  
 "I'll String Along with You," 254, 285  
 "I'm a Doctor for Women," 177, 201  
 "I'm a Doctor for You," 178  
 "I'm a Fugitive," 285  
 "I'm a Stationary Mama Looking for a Permanent Man," 72, 187  
 "I'm a Very Highly Educated Man," 78  
 "I'm Confessing That I Love You," 148  
 "I'm Crazy about My Baby," 69, 70–71, 81, 148  
 "I'm Crazy about You," 154  
 "I'm Draggin' My Heart Around," 69  
 "I'm Falling in Love with Someone," 201  
 "I'm Going to Live My Live Alone," 126  
 "I'm Gonna Hold My Baby Tight," 242  
 "I'm Gonna Die with My Staff in My Hand," 40  
 "I'm Gonna Do That Woman In," 242, 300  
 "I'm Gonna Take It Easy," 143, 176  
 "I'm Just a Rollin' Stone," 48  
 "I'm Just Crazy," 227  
 "I'm Just Like the Bear," 229  
 "I'm Leaning on the Lord," 149  
 "I'm Longing for My Old Gal Sal," 44  
 "I'm Not Ashamed," 163  
 "I'm Not the One You Love," 252  
 "I'm Only Another for You," 40, 44  
 "I'm Pinching Myself," 74  
 "I'm Saving It All for You," 42  
 "I'm Sorry Sally," 55  
 "I'm Standing at the Doorway to Your Heart," 248  
 "I'm the One," 125, 220, 267–68  
 "I'm to Blame," 165–66, 171  
 "I'm Travelin' On," 243  
 "I'm Truckin' Away from You," 82  
 "I'm Twisting Loops in Pretzels," 90  
 "I'm Wild about That Thing," 59, 76  
 "In My Dreams," 193  
 "In My Dream of Waikiki," 73  
 "In 1983," 82  
 "In That Vine Covered Chapel," 82  
 "In the Hush of the Night," 146  
 "In the Quiet of the Dawn," 133  
 "In the Snow Capped Hills of Wyoming," 74  
 "In the Valley of Golden Dreams," 215, 267  
 "Indiana Blues," 111, 168  
 "Indiana Moonlight," 297

- "Investigatin' Papa," 246  
 "Irish Washerwoman," 151, 179  
 "Is I Gotta Go to School Ma?," 90  
 "It Ain't No Fault of Mine," 56  
 "It Doesn't Happen Every Day," 254, 259  
 "It Feels So Good," 32, 60, 100  
 "It Hurts Me But I Like It," 169, 250  
 "It Pays to Advertise," 47  
 "It Takes Money Honey," 237  
 "It Was So Good," 236  
 "It Won't Be Long Now," 45  
 "It's Been So Long," 292  
 "It's Getting Soft," 164, 171  
 "It's Gonna Be a Long Hard Winter," 182  
 "It's Got a Hole in It," 142, 154  
 "It's Harlem's Music," 97  
 "It's Heated Red Hot!," 52  
 "It's So Good," 133  
 "It's Too Late Now," 186  
 "It's You I Love," 266  
 "I've Done My Bit for Uncle Sam," 5  
 "I've Had My Moments," 148  
 "I've Lost All My Love for You," 37-38  
  
 "Jack, Jack, Jack," 190  
 "Jack the Cat," 237  
 "Jacksonville," 48  
 "Jake's Weary Blues," 31  
 "Jay Bird," 265  
 "Jealous of Me," 47, 102  
 "Jelly Apples," 291  
 "Jelly Roll Blues," 226  
 "Jelly Roll Queen," xviii, 42  
 "Jersey Lightning," 58  
 "Jersey Turnpike," 222  
 "Jim Town Blues," 149  
 "Jingle Bell Boogie," 131, 139, 187  
 "John Dillinger," 82  
 "Johnson Street Boogie Woogie," 160  
 "Joint Is Jumpin', The," 107, 148  
 "Joy Ride," 265  
 "Judgement Day," 235  
 "Julia," 163, 174  
 "Jump Town," 222, 241, 247  
 "Jumpin' with Judy," 154  
 "Junker Blues," 170  
  
 "Just for You," 16, 126  
 "Just Sociable," 65  
 "Just Wondering," 100, 196  
  
 "Kangaroo, The," 299  
 "Kansas City Boogie Woogie," 124  
 "Kansas City Man Blues," 17  
 "Kansas Kapers," 260  
 "Katy Blues," 196  
 "Keep a Song in Your Soul," 65  
 "Keep Your Knees Together Daughter,"  
     298  
 "Keep Your Nose Out of Mama's  
     Business," 72, 76, 182  
 "Keepin' Out of Trouble," 112  
 "Keeping Out of Mischief Now," 72, 89  
 "Kentucky Lullaby," 73  
 "King Is Blue, A," 231  
 "Kitchen Mechanic's Parade," 64  
 "Krazy Kat Records," 236  
  
 "Lady Be Good," 148, 168  
 "Lament of the Lion," 102  
 "Lenox Avenue Shuffle," 26  
 "Let the Daddy Hold You," 256, 269  
 "Let's Be Honest with Each Other," 154  
 "Let's Get High Jack," 188  
 "Let's Get It Straight," 59  
 "Let's Go the Rent's Due," 159  
 "Let's Keep It Cool," 222  
 "Let's Keep Our Streets Clean," 214  
 "Levee Camp Moan Blues," 46  
 "Lighthouse," 106, 154  
 "Light-House," 268-69  
 "Lightnin' Boogie," 131, 154  
 "Like an Angel You Flew into Everyone's  
     Hearts (Lindbergh)," 44  
 "Like It 'Cause I Love You," 154  
 "Lindbergh," 44  
 "Lindbergh Hop," 297  
 "Listen to Dr. Jive," 263  
 "Little Bird Told Me, A," 209  
 "Little Marion Parker," 53  
 "Little Old Log Cabin," 171  
 "Living Doll," 291  
 "Lonely Soldier Blues," 235

- "Look for Me in Tennessee," 7
- "Look Out, Jack," 146
- "Looka What You Did to Me," 256
- "Lookin' for Love," 87
- "Lost Opportunity Blues," 22
- "Lost Train Blues," 82
- "Louisiana Swing," 66
- "Louisville Blues," 15, 23
- "Lovable Lilly," 260
- "Love Affairs," 55
- "Love Is True," 266
- "Love Me Tender," 271, 299
- "Love Strike Blues," 177-78
- "Loveable Lilly," 253
- "Loveless Love," 150
- "Lovesick Blues," 6
- "Lovin' Blues," 17, 202
- "Low Tide," 87
- "Lullaby Lady," 75
- "Lumber Jack," 64
- 
- "Mad Mama's Blues," 25-26
- "Madhouse," 87
- "Make Happiness Your Goal," 299
- "Make-Believe Ball Room," 88, 90
- "Makeena," 271
- "Mama Mia," 215, 267
- "Mama Put Your Britches On," 126, 207
- "Mama's Well Done Gone Dry," 80,  
185-86, 276
- "Man of the Hour, Mr. Eisenhower, The"  
117
- "Man Shortage Blues," 118, 120-21
- "Maple on the Hill," 103-4
- "March of the Dolls," 45, 47
- "Margie," 187
- "Mary Ann," 281-82
- "Mary Had a Little Jam," 106
- "Mayor of Toy Town, The," 87
- "Me and My Shadow," 44, 301
- "Me Too," 299
- "Me Van Mata," 180
- "Mean Daddy," 24
- "Mean Mistreater Blues," 198
- "Mean Old Bedbug Blues," 42-43, 46, 72
- "Meaning of Love, The," 256
- 
- "Meat Man Pete," 187, 276
- "Meditation," 77
- "Melancholy Horn," 265
- "Memphis Bound," 25
- "Mem'ries of Southern Seas," 91
- "Mental Strain at Dawn," 67
- "Message from Home, A," 154
- "Mia Sola Seras," 180
- "Miami Storm," 39
- "Midnight Boogie Woogie," 160
- "Midnight Mama," 168
- "Mighty Lackawanna," 74
- "Milk and Gin," 230
- "Mine's Just as Good as Yours," 41
- "Minute Man 1 & 2," 196-97
- "Miseries, The," 222
- "Miss Meal Cramps," 60
- "Miss Sacks Is Wearing Slacks," 282
- "Miss Susan Green," xviii
- "Mississippi Basin," 75
- "Mistreatin' Daddy Blues," 23
- "Monday's Wash," 102, 107, 124, 141, 268
- "Monkey and the Baboon," 49, 90, 142
- "Monkey Business," 91
- "Monkey Jungle Blues," xviii
- "Mood in Blue," 251
- "Moon Rose," 87
- "Moonlight Down in Lover's Lane," 75
- "Moonlight Is My Spread," 196
- "Moonrise on the Carribean," 186
- "Most Emphatic'lly Yes," 163
- "Mr. Black Man," 257-58, 300
- "Mrs. Jimmie Rodgers Lament," 78
- "Muggin' Lightly," 71
- "Music Goes Round and Round, The," 87
- "My Baby Comes First with Me," 117,  
171, 177
- "My Baby's Little Shoes," 244
- "My Carolina Home," 50
- "My Handy Man," 76, 280
- "My Home in Oklahoma," 71
- "My Honky-Tonk," 277
- "My Lovin' Mamie," 13
- "My Mamacita," 118
- "My Man o' War," 76, 280
- "My Memory Trail," 214

- "My Only One," 64  
 "My Pretty Girl," 43  
 "My Pussy Belongs to Daddy," 281, 291, 294  
 "My Right Hand Man," 80  
 "My Window Faces the South," 95  
 "My Solid Gold Automobile," 267–68  
 "My Wild Irish Rose," 275  
  
 "Naggin' Will Not Hold Your Man," 182  
 "Nappy Headed Blues," 46  
 "Neath Hawaiian Skies," 73  
 "Nebraska Moon," 74  
 "Never Be Cruel to the One You Love," 154  
 "Never Brag about Your Man," 185  
 "Never Give Up Hope," 245  
 "Never Heard of Such Stuff," 47  
 "Never Judge a Book by Its Cover," 185  
 "Never Love Anybody Better Than Yourself," 237  
 "Never Trouble Trouble," 227  
 "New Orleans," 14, 24  
 "New Orleans Twist," 81  
 "Next Week Sometime," 59  
 "Night Train," 231  
 "Nighty-Night," 217  
 "No Fish Today," 126  
 "No More Blues," 75  
 "No One Else Will Do," 154, 220, 245  
 "No Te Queiro," 180  
 "Nobody Knows Me Like My Little Girl," 210, 241  
 "Nobody Met the Train," 248  
 "Not Now, I'll Tell You When," 143, 176  
 "Nothing But the Blues," 81  
 "Number ooooo," 278  
  
 "O Sole Mio," 152, 277  
 "Oh! What a Babe," 249  
 "Oh What a Wonderful Time," 269  
 "Okay Baby," 270  
 "Old Fashioned Blues," 228  
 "Old Fashioned Picture, An," 39  
 "Old Grand Dad," 118  
 "Old Joe Clark," 166, 171  
  
 "Old Knock-Kneed Sal," 98  
 "Old New England March," 88  
 "Olga on the Volga," 91  
 "On Decoration Day," 41  
 "On Revival Day," 64  
 "On That Power Line," 247  
 "On the Banks of the Wabash," 246  
 "On the 'Bean,'" 146  
 "On the Level," 64  
 "One That I Was Born to Love, The," 65  
 "Only Just Suppose," 14  
 "O-O-O-Oh," 249  
 "Otra Vez," 180  
 "Ouch!," 169, 250  
 "Our Love Was Meant to Be," 92  
 "Out to Lunch," 146  
  
 "Palm Garde," 107  
 "Palsy Walsy Land," 234  
 "Papa, If You Can't Do Better (I'll Let Another Papa Move In)," 3, 41–42  
 "Papa Ain't No Santa Claus," 64  
 "Paper Roses," 260  
 "Paradise Rock," 255  
 "Paradise Roll," 255  
 "Part-Time Boogie," 140, 154, 268  
 "Peach Tree Street Blues," 159, 167  
 "Pearly May," 196  
 "Pencil Won't Write No More," 78  
 "Penitentiary Blues," 43  
 "Percy the Pale Faced Polar Bear," 217, 234  
 "Perdido Street Blues," 106  
 "Pergadito," 180  
 "Perhaps, Perhaps," 190–92  
 "Piano Cocktail," 140, 268  
 "Piano Moods," 269  
 "Picture of Mother, A," 7  
 "Playing the Field," 207  
 "Pleasant Dreams," 107  
 "Please Don't Talk about My Man," 75  
 "Poet and Peasant Boogie," 156  
 "Pork and Beans," 48  
 "Porter's Love Song (to a Chambermaid), A," 63, 64, 79  
 "Precious One," 297

- "President Coolidge March," 64  
 "President Harding March," 7  
 "President Hoover March," 63–64  
 "Preston Mash," 299  
 "Pretty Baby, What's Your Name?," 249  
 "Primrose Valse," 181  
 "Prisoner of Love," 64  
 "Providence Help the Poor People," 79  
 "Puppy Dog's Tail," 92  
 "Pussy," 48, 77  
 "Put a Little Bug in Your Ear," 238  
  
 "Quality Shout," 65  
 "Queen Isabella," 87  
 "Queen of the Poconos," 209  
 "Qui Sait, Qui Sait, Qui Sait," 190  
 "Quizas, Quizas, Quizas," 190–91, 301  
  
 "Radio Papa Broadcast Mama," 72  
 "Rambler, The," 181  
 "Rambling Freight Train Blues," 105  
 "Recollections," 146  
 "Red Apple Rag," 82  
 "Red Caps Ball," 133  
 "Red Hot Dan," 47  
 "Red River Valley," 94  
 "Red Wing," 171  
 "Rest of Your Life, The," 147  
 "Revolt of the Yes-Men," 75  
 "Rhapsody Boogie," 156  
 "Ridiculous Blues," 31  
 "Riding on the Old Ferris Wheel," 95  
 "Riffin' with Riff Raff," 164  
 "Ring-Ting," 291  
 "Roamin' Rambler Blues," 43  
 "Roamin' Ranger," 74  
 "Rock and Rye," 198  
 "Rockin' Rollers' Jubilee," 95  
 "Rockin' through Georgia," 222  
 "Root Man Blues," 196  
 "Rosetta," 81  
 "Royal Crown Blues," 231  
 "Royal Flush," 231  
 "Royal Garden Blues," 69  
 "Rum Cola Blues," 160  
 "Run Pretty Baby," 256  
  
 "Sad and Lonesome Blues," 196  
 "Same Old Beat, The," 178  
 "San Francisco Blues," xviii, 16, 19  
 "Santa Claus," 196  
 "Sapphire," 47  
 "Saratoga Shout," 66  
 "Saturday Evening Blues," 224  
 "Saturday Night Twist," 269  
 "Save It, Pretty Mama," 159, 167, 187,  
     266–67, 275  
 "Save Your Money, John," 6–7  
 "Savoy Shot," 66  
 "Swanee River," 148–49  
 "Sellin' That Stuff," 150  
 "September Song," 272  
 "Serenade for a Wealthy Widow," 75  
 "Shake It Down," 48–49  
 "Shake the Blues Away," 152, 189  
 "Shake Your Can," 64, 91, 182, 280  
 "Shakin' the Blues Away," 226–27  
 "Shave 'Em Dry," 294  
 "She Belongs to Me," 30, 40  
 "She Don't Know What She Wants," 71  
 "She Gave Her Heart to a Soldier Boy,"  
     117  
 "She Makes Good Jelly," 160  
 "She Walked Right in and Took My Man  
     Away," 14, 18  
 "Sheik of Araby," 148, 187  
 "She'll Be Coming around the  
     Mountain," 94  
 "She's Forty with Me," 43  
 "She's Makin' Whoopee in Hell Tonight,"  
     71  
 "She's Nine Months Gone from Home,"  
     91, 272  
 "Show Them You Can Dance," 292  
 "Sinful Blues," 22  
 "Singin' the Blues," 277  
 "Sittin' on Top of the World," 67  
 "Six-Thirty Express," 140  
 "Skater's Waltz," 185  
 "Sleepy Little Cowboy," 220, 250, 253  
 "Sleepy Time in Caroline," 178, 203–5,  
     213, 302  
 "Slide, Kelly, Slide," 5

- "Slippy Hips," 64  
 "Sloppy Drunk Again," 196  
 "Slow Drag," 161  
 "Smiles and Kisses," 14  
 "Smith Waltz," 82  
 "Smoke from Your Cigarette," 249  
 "Smoke Rings," 148  
 "Sneakin' Home," 107  
 "Somebody's Been Borrowing That Thing," 79, 198  
 "Somebody's Lonely in Hawaii," 73  
 "Somebody's Lyin'," 139, 154, 259  
 "Song of the Plough," 80  
 "Song of the Swanee," 66  
 "Sorrow Valley Blues," 45  
 "Southern Holiday," 81  
 "Special Delivery," 254  
 "S'posin'," 11, 33, 56–57, 60, 68, 87, 89, 98, 107, 117  
 "Spread Yo Stuff," 11  
 "Spring Street Waltz," 82  
 "Squareface," 81  
 "St. Louis Blues," 150, 221  
 "St. Louis Boogie," 221  
 "Stack o' Barley," 181  
 "Star Dust," 272  
 "Stars and Stripes Forever," 151, 246–47  
 "Start Talking—I'm All Ears," 148  
 "Stayin' at Home," 102  
 "Steady Grind," 255  
 "Steady Time Special, A," 124  
 "Stomp Your Blues Away," 41  
 "Story of the Love Affair, The," 151  
 "Strictly on the Safety Side," 201  
 "Struttin' at the Funny Paper Ball," 30  
 "Suez," 14, 44, 50, 81  
 "Suffer," 210–11  
 "Sugar Foot Stomp," 149  
 "Sugar Hill Boogie," 131, 154  
 "Sugar Lips," 155, 206–7  
 "Sundown Blues," 59  
 "Sunset in Bermuda," 90  
 "Susianna," 56  
 "Swampy Ground," 78  
 "Sweater Song, The," 282  
 "Sweet as a Flower," 285  
 "Sweet Dreams," 115  
 "Sweet Georgia Brown," 259  
 "Sweet Hawaiian Moonlight," 90, 134  
 "Sweet Man Joe," 23, 34  
 "Sweet Sixteen," 196  
 "Sweetheart Serenade," 111–12  
 "Swingin' at the Hickory House," 87  
 "Syncopated Bride and Groom," 4–5  
 "Table Top Boogie," 132  
 "Taint Yours," 136, 154  
 "Take It Easy," 29  
 "Take Your Tomorrow," 90  
 "Take Your Tomorrow (Give Me Your Today)," 51, 55  
 "Tales from the Vienna Woods," 185  
 "Tall, Tall Woman," 235  
 "Tallahassee," 65  
 "Talvez," 180  
 "T.B. Blues," 52  
 "Tears, Tears, Tears," 243, 269, 278  
 "Teasin' Me," 142  
 "Tell Me Baby," 242  
 "Tell Me Your Blues and I'll Tell You Mine," 113–15, 200  
 "Tell Santy I Live in a Shanty," 88  
 "Tenderly," 259  
 "Tennessee Twilight," 74  
 "Tennessee Walk," 238–39  
 "Terrible Operation Blues," 150  
 "Texas Man," 40  
 "Thanks to You," 65  
 "That Black Snake Moan," 41  
 "That Cat's Evil," 227  
 "That Glory Day," 147–48, 152–53  
 "That's a Gasser," 167  
 "That's Alright," 164  
 "That's Got 'Em," 5–6  
 "That's the Kind of Man for Me," 70  
 "That's the Stuff," 142  
 "There's Many a Smiling Face That's Covering an Aching Heart," 5  
 "There's Nothing Wrong with This World," 271  
 "These Foolish Things Remind Me of You," 272



- "This Will Be a Lonesome Summer  
 (Without You)," 111  
 "Those Blues," 16  
 "Three Cheers for Our President," 110  
 "Throw It Out Your Mind," 166  
 "Thunderbolt," 255  
 "Tiger Rag," 148, 168  
 "Tilin-Tilan," 180  
 "Tisket, A Tasket, A," 103  
 "Tony's Got Hot Nuts," 281, 291, 294  
 "Toy Town Band," 94  
 "Toyland Jubilee," 217  
 "Travelin' This Lonesome Road," 196  
 "Traveling Shoes," 171  
 "Treat Me Kindly," 148  
 "Triflin' Mama," 29  
 "Triflin' Man Blues," 13  
 "Trombone Jitters," 170  
 "True Love," 285  
 "Truthfully," 165, 170–71, 174, 219, 245,  
 263–64, 300  
 "Tuscaloosa," 125, 155  
 "Tuxedo Junction," 149  
 "20-99 Blues," 117  
 "Two-Faced Man," 113–15, 155  
 "Two-Thirds Dead," 236  
  
 "Ultra Sox," 149  
 "Ultrafox," 149  
 "Undertaker Blues," 25  
  
 "Vader's Kleine Meid," 212  
 "Valse Caprice," 185  
 "Vice Versa," 185  
 "Viper's Drag," 77, 79, 90, 94  
 "Virginia's Blues," 251  
  
 "Wait and See," 71, 86  
 "Walkin' by the River," 136  
 "Walkin' Down Main Street," 222  
 "Walkin' on Air," 291  
 "Waltzing with a Dream," 269  
 "Wand'r'in' Around," 107  
 "Want My Man All the Time," 20  
 "Was It You," 154  
 "Washboard Ballet," 71  
  
 "Wasn't It You?," 139  
 "Watchman Fell Asleep, The," 111  
 "Way Down South Where the Blues  
 Began," 151  
 "Waycross, Georgia Blues," 49  
 "We Need Each Other," 163  
 "Wearing of the Green," 151, 179  
 "Well Digg'in' Papa," 196  
 "Wer Weiss, Wer Weiss, Wer Weiss," 190  
 "West Indian Overcoat," 39  
 "Wet Deck Mama," 177–78  
 "Whalin' Away," 226–27  
 "What Have I Done Wrong," 196  
 "What Makes Papa Hate Mama So," 35  
 "What Will I Do in the Morning," 47, 102  
 "What Would You Give in Exchange for  
 Your Soul," 201  
 "What'll You Have," 188  
 "What's New," 246  
 "What's Your Price," 72, 276  
 "When Hannah Plays Piano," 65  
 "When I Meet You," 240  
 "When the Saints Come Marching In,"  
 213, 251  
 "When the Wind Makes Connection  
 with Your Dry Goods," 41  
 "When Two Love Each Other," 93  
 "Whenever I Think of You," 154  
 "Where Can I Find a Cherry (For My  
 Banana Split)," 91, 166, 276, 281  
 "Where Did You Stay Last Night," 150  
 "Whip, The," 265  
 "White Ghost Shivers," 38  
 "Why Did You Leave Me," 242  
 "Why Does a Bee Like His Honey," 154  
 "Why Don't You Drive My Blues Away,"  
 6–7  
 "Why Is My Little Red Head Blue?," 115  
 "Why Should I Cry Over You," 235  
 "Wild Cow Blues," 198  
 "Wild Cow Moan," 80  
 "Will You Forgive Me," 16  
 "William Tell," 87  
 "Willie the Weeper," 90, 268  
 "Wine Drinker Blues," 178  
 "Without a Song," 210

- "Without You Baby," 136, 154
- "Wonder Where My Baby's Gone," 196
- "Won't Someone Help Me Find My  
Lovin' Man," 12
- "Won't You Teach an Old Time Love  
Song," 6
- "Words Can't Explain," 134, 201, 297
- "Working for My Baby," 262
- "Wylie Avenue Blues," 45, 261
- 
- "Yesterday's Memories," 253, 260
- "You Ain't Had No Blues," 120, 228
- "You Ain't No Good," 127, 155
- "You and Your Heart of Stone," 142
- "You Can Always Believe Your Heart,"  
209
- "You Can't Have It Unless I Give It to  
You," 187
- "You Gotta Swing It," 47
- "You Gotta Take Your Time," 154
- "You Move Me Baby," 271
- "(You Were Only) Passing Time with  
Me," 65, 67
- "You'd Better Stop Playing with Fire," 164
- "You'd Rather Forget than Forgive,"  
49–50
- "You'll Always Be Welcome," 57
- "You'll Regret It One Day," 139
- "You'll Want My Love, But Honey It Will  
Be All Gone," 11
- "Youngster's Blues," 227
- "Your Sweet Smile," 148
- "You're Goin' to Need That Pure  
Religion," 149
- "You're Gonna Change Your Mind," 142,  
147
- "You're Gonna Wake Up Some Morning,  
But Your Papa Will Be Gone," 23
- "You're Mine," 224, 230
- "You're One," 237
- "You're the Apple of My Eye," 273
- 
- "Zig Zag," 59

# Name and Subject Index

- Abbott, Ernestine Hassel, 254, 257  
 Abney, Don, 238  
 Abtone Studio, 299  
 Acuff, Roy, 177  
 AFM (American Federation of Musicians), 110–12, 116, 118, 120, 130, 139–40, 142–45, 151, 159–63, 168–70, 177, 190, 194–95, 213, 222, 227, 255, 273, 280  
 Ajax Record Company, xvii, 3, 18–26, 40, 169, 187, 297, 302  
 Alexander, Sam, 221  
 Alexander, Willard, 195  
*All My Children*, 234  
 Allen, Henry “Red,” 72  
 Allen, Napoleon “Snags,” 239  
 Allen, Shorty, 221, 234  
 Allen, Walter C., 85–86  
 Alpineers, The, 179, 181, 183  
 Ambrister, Ernest, 221  
 Ambrose Orchestra, 275  
 Anderson, Ivie, 227  
 Anderson, Marian, 149, 158, 171  
 Anderson, Mozelle, 150  
 Andraws, Judy, 293  
 Andrea Music, 225, 293  
 Angelina, 280  
 Anita Bryant Ministries International, 260  
 A-1 Studios, 291  
 Apollo Records, 239  
 Apollo Theater, 157, 233, 237, 263–64  
 Arcadia Ballroom, 221  
 Archer, Don, 263  
 Armstrong, Louis, xi, xvii, 98, 105, 122, 258  
 Armstrong (Hardin), Lil, 80, 99, 120–21, 228  
 Arnold, Kokomo, 128  
 ASCAP (American Society of Composers Authors, Publishers), xii, 4, 66, 74–76, 83–85, 93, 95–96, 98, 108–11, 137, 188, 205–7, 222, 267  
 Asch, Moses, 123, 159  
 Ashley, Hugh, 215  
 Atlantic Records, 274  
 Audio-Video Studio, 242  
 Austin, Gene, 61  
 Austin, Lovie, 29  
 Autrey, Herman, 78  
 Bagby, Doc, 292–93  
 Bahari, Joe, 289  
 Bailey, Mildred, 156  
 Bailey, Pearl, 272  
 Bailey, Specs, 255, 270  
 Baker, Abe, 281  
 Baker, Lizzie, 232, 236–37  
 Baker, Mickey, 249, 253–56, 262, 268  
 Ballen, Ivin, 182, 225, 292  
 Banks, Billy, 72  
 Banta, Frank, 179, 181  
 Baque, Joe, 291  
 Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks), 48–49, 60, 128  
 Barefield, Eddie, 145–46, 165  
 Barker, Blue Lu, 209  
 Barksdale, Everett, 75, 151, 225, 239, 258, 263, 266, 285, 291  
 Barlow, Dean, 230, 243–45, 252–54, 256–57, 259, 263–64, 266, 285, 292, 301  
 Barnicle, Mary Elizabeth, 127  
 Basie, Count, 136, 269  
 Bastin, Bruce, vii, ix  
 Baucom, Luther, 105  
 Baxter, Helen (Ellen Coleman), 18–19

- Beach Boys, The, 288  
 Beacon Music, 200, 207–8, 211, 215, 249, 267, 278  
 Beacon Records, viii, 106, 110–16, 119, 125–31, 135–36, 138–40, 143–44, 155, 223, 252, 275, 281–82  
 Beatles, The, 288  
*Beggar's Holiday*, 182  
 Beiderbeck, Bix, 57, 144, 185  
 Belasco, Lionel, 282  
 Bell, Lucy Davis, xi, xv  
 Bell Boys, The, 186  
 Belvedere Studios, 290, 292  
 Benjamin, Joe, 225  
 Benny Payne Trio, 225  
 Benson, Roy, 292  
 Berigan, Bunny, 95  
 Berlin, Irving, 66  
 Berliner, Herbert S., 21  
 Berman, Shelly, 289  
 Bernal, Gil, 265  
 Bernard, Al, 7, 10, 14, 28, 77, 169–70  
 Bernstein, Louis, 83–84  
 Berry, Chu, 85–87  
 Berry, Emmitt, 135  
 Best, Denzil, 146  
 Best, Skeeter, 266–68, 270–71  
 Betzner, Jack, 301  
 Biggs, Howard, 263, 267  
 Billings, Kenneth, 151  
 Birmingham Boogie Boys, The, 228  
 Bishop, Wallace, 147  
 Biviano, Joe, 179, 209, 277, 290  
 Black & White Records, 224  
 Black Swan Records, 17  
*Blackbirds of 1929*, 225  
 Blackwell, Otis, viii, 222–23, 242–44, 247–49, 256, 269–71, 273, 277–79  
 Blake, Eubie, 64, 91, 301  
 Bledsoe, Jules, 123, 140, 158  
 Blenders, 239–41, 244, 259, 300  
 Bloom, Rube, 29–30, 33–34, 38, 45, 47–48, 97, 134  
 Bluebird Records, 95, 100, 107, 133, 136, 196, 267, 297  
 Blues Chasers, The, 228, 251  
*Blues Unlimited*, 301  
 Bluesville Records, 290  
 BMI, 108–9, 137, 207, 222  
*Boarding House Blues*, 236  
 Bodkins, Billy, 182  
 Bogan, Lucille, 294  
 Boney, James, 205–6  
 Bop Jackson's Dukes of Rhythm, 188  
 Bosman, Millie, 223, 227–30  
 Bostic, Earl, 231  
 Bowman, Dave, 163, 166  
 Bradford, Perry, xiv, 66, 102  
 Bradley, Will, 139–40, 154–55, 171, 187, 229–31, 246  
 Braun, Albert, 260  
 Brees, Bud, 217  
 Brett, Shela, 281  
 Brightman, Bernie, 302  
 Brill Building, 111, 192, 200, 279  
 Broadway, Hobson, 186  
 Brockman, Polk, 46, 59, 67  
 Brooks, Eugene, 141  
 Broonzy, Big Bill, 150  
 Brown, Bessie, 35, 40  
 Brown, Delores, 30, 117–18, 171  
 Brown, Gabriel, xi, 123, 125, 142–45, 155, 163–65, 167, 170–74, 176, 180, 198, 209–11, 222–23, 227, 232, 240–41, 244, 298, 301  
 Brown, James, 258  
 Brown, John Henry, 186  
 Brown, Kitty, 28  
 Brown, Ray, 254  
 Brown, Romaine, 126, 157, 164, 168  
 Brown, Vernon, 142  
 Brunswick Records, 38, 44, 70, 72  
 Bryant, Anita, 260  
 Bryant, Beulah, 229–31, 240  
 Bryant, Willie, 258  
 Buck and Bubbles, 133  
 Buller, Leo, 241  
 Burdett Records, 296  
 Burleigh, Harry T., 66  
 Burnett, Rev. J. C., 157–58, 165, 180, 219  
 Burns, Joseph W., 217

- Bushell, Garvin, 10  
 Bushnell, Bob, 292  
 Butterbeans and Susie, xviii, 28, 42  
 Butterfield, Billy, 142, 163  
 Butterfield, Erskine, 101–2, 106–7, 110,  
     112–13, 118, 122, 124, 140–42, 145, 154,  
     165–66, 180, 184, 186, 266–69, 271,  
     274, 277  
 Bux-Mont Record Company, 214  
 Bynum, Robert, 245
- Caceres, Ernie, 159  
 Cade, Harold, 226  
 Cadet Record Company, 289  
 Cahn, Sammy, 82  
 Caiazza, Nick, 166, 215  
 Cali, John, 169  
 Calloway, Cab, 114, 135, 225  
 Cameo Records, 42  
 Camp, Armen, 153–55  
 Canova, Judy, 179  
 Capital Records, 113, 130, 209, 214–15  
 Carlisle, Una Mae, 72, 132, 135–37, 140,  
     142, 147–48, 152, 154–55, 163, 165–66,  
     171, 180, 236  
 Carr, Leroy, 159–60  
 Carribean Music Inc., 176, 189, 191–92,  
     278, 301  
 Carroll, Frank, 242, 248  
 Carter, Benny, 156, 169  
 Carter, Eddie, 223, 226–29  
 Carter, Robert H., 225  
 Carter-Rays, 223, 225  
 Cary, Dick, 246  
 Casa Loma Orchestra, 154  
 Case, Russ, 113  
 Casey, Al, 78–79, 119  
 Castle (Castaldo), Lee, 246, 249, 251,  
     267, 271, 275, 277, 290–91  
 Cathedral Music, 7–9  
 Catlett, Sid, 150  
 Cauto, Septeto, 150  
 Celebrity Records, viii, 135, 139, 144–46,  
     155, 178, 200–203, 209, 211, 214–15,  
     224, 275, 285, 290  
 Celestin, Oscar, 53
- Ceppos, Mac, 281  
 Chamberlain, Ronnie, 218  
 Chambers, Paul, 188, 290  
 Cheatham, Doc, 147, 165, 299  
 Cheech and His Jazz Band, 187  
 Chessler, Deborah, 233  
 Chestnuts, The, 261, 263, 266–67, 270  
 Chicago Record Company, 182  
 Chisholm, Mae, 280  
 Chittison, Herman, 78  
 Christian, Buddy, 32  
 Churchill, Savannah, 113–16, 125, 142,  
     144–45, 155, 167, 171, 174, 185, 200–  
     201, 209, 244  
 Citation Records, 223  
 Clark, Barb, 297  
 Clarke, Buddy, 113, 115  
 Clayton, Steve, 293  
 Cleveland, Jimmy, 256  
 Cody, Wayne, 212  
 Cole, Cozy, 145, 159, 243, 246, 275  
 Cole, Nat King, 231  
 Coleman, Ruth, 16, 18  
 Collins, Billy, 245  
 Collins, John, 239  
 Collins, Sam, 144  
 Collins, William “Hud,” 259  
 Columbia Record Company, 24, 41, 43,  
     48–50, 59, 64–65, 70, 75, 86, 96, 131,  
     133, 149, 152, 157, 169, 186, 191, 198,  
     209, 214  
 Combelle, Alix, 148  
 Condon, Eddie, 72  
*Confidential*, 280  
 Confrey, Zez, 74, 87  
 Connie’s Inn, 60, 70  
 Continentals, The, 285  
 Cooper, Rob, 77  
 Cooper, Thelma, 293  
 Coots, J. Fred, 5  
 Copeland, Martha, 40–41, 45, 46, 48,  
     96, 186  
 Coral Records, 211, 214, 227, 241, 270  
 Cotton, Billy, 212  
 Cotton, Sammy, 224  
 Courtney, Diane, 208

- Crayne, Leslie, 237  
 Crickets, 221, 224, 230, 235, 237–41, 242,  
     243–46, 249, 252, 254, 259, 271, 292,  
     295, 301  
 Crockett's Mountaineers, 119, 122  
 Crosby, Bing, xvii, 57, 90, 92, 191  
 Crosby, Bob, 141–42, 163, 215, 246  
 Crosby, Israel, 164, 168  
 Crown Records, 119, 181, 289, 302  
 Crudup, Arthur "Big Boy," 120, 210  
 Crump, Bill, 254  
 Culley, Frank, 222–23  
 Curtis, James, 261  
 Cutshall, Cutty, 213
- Dalhart, Vernon, 59, 74, 91  
 D'Amico, Hank, 166, 185, 215, 234  
 Dance Tone Records, 214  
 Dardenella, 290  
 Dasher, Joe, 282  
 Davega, Dolores, 255  
 Davenport, Cow Cow, 159–61, 164, 183  
 Davern, Kenny, 213  
 Davis, Bertha, 259, 300  
 Davis, Beryl, 195  
 Davis, Blind John, 96, 225  
 Davis, Jasper, 32, 60  
 Davis, Jewel, 300  
 Davis, Lucille, 300  
 Davis, Miles, 256, 268, 290  
 Davis, Walter, 96, 99, 105, 195–98  
 Davis Music Company, 110  
 Davis Records, 175, 178  
 Decca, 184  
 Decca Record Company, 59, 72, 75,  
     87, 90, 92–98, 102–7, 113, 130–31,  
     140, 163, 191, 211, 213–15, 218, 237,  
     239  
 Deep River Boys, 219–21, 236, 245, 250,  
     253, 255, 259, 300  
 Del Rio, Lana, 283–84  
 Del Rio Sisters, 234  
 Delaney, Thomas, xviii, 22, 24, 27, 29, 45  
 DeLuxe Records, 133, 143  
 Denniker, Paul, 56–58, 64, 73, 75, 79, 81,  
     88, 91–92, 111–12, 187
- Derby Records, 224  
 Dexter, Al, 142  
 Dias, Joseph, 245  
 Dickens, Doles, 126, 157, 164, 292–93  
 Dickson, Artell, 117  
 Dillard, Bill, 182, 185, 291  
 Dixieaires, 203  
*Dixieland Heaven*, 276  
 Dixon, Dave, 248  
 Dixon, Dorsey, 98, 113  
 Doggett, Bill, 268, 293  
 Doherty, Bob, 225, 236  
 Domino, Fats, 170, 268  
 Donaldson, Bobby, 235, 258, 271, 285,  
     291  
 Dorham, Kenny, 254  
 Dorsey, George, 221, 297  
 Dorsey, Jimmy, 163  
 Dorsey, Thomas (Georgia Tom), 150  
 Dorsey, Tommy, 97, 123, 142, 150, 246  
 Douglas, Harry, 219  
 Dovers, The, 285  
 Downy, Morton, 215  
 Dr. Jive, 265–66  
 Dreyer, Lewis, 273, 277–78  
 Driggs, Frank, 15  
 Dry, Charles, 260  
 Dupree, "Champion" Jack, 125, 159, 165,  
     170–71, 177, 180, 190, 201, 293, 298  
 Durante, Jimmy, 9, 29  
 Durham, Eddie, 126
- Eberle, Bob, 191  
 Eddie Carter Quartette, 225  
 Edison National Historical Site, 301  
 Edison Record Company, 18–26, 41, 302  
 Edwards, Frank, 172, 285  
 Einhorn, Cy, 185  
 Ellington, Duke, xi, xvii, 3, 15, 34, 55, 60,  
     136, 225, 227  
 Elliott, Thurmon, 219  
 Ellis, Big Chief, 298  
 Ellis, Phil, 244  
 Elm Records, 205  
 Elvis Presley Music, 273–74  
 Empire Recording Studio, 122, 127, 142,

- 151–52, 157–58, 160, 164–65, 168–69,  
186, 206
- English, Peggy, 33–35
- Escobar-Casas, Gabriel, 198
- Etting, Ruth, 69
- Evans, Joe, 256
- Evans, Sticks, 292
- Everetts, Dorothy, 53
- Exclusive Records, 203
- Family Album*, 290
- Famous Bluejay Singers (of  
Birmingham), 179, 211
- Fay, Jack, 213
- Feather, Leonard, 133, 136, 221–22
- Fernanders, James, 262
- Ferrante, Arthur, 221, 291
- Fields, Ernie, 254
- Finnie, Ethel, 23
- Fitzgerald, Ella, 103, 120, 221, 233
- Five Angels of Harmony, The, 247
- 5 Barons, The, 220, 235
- Five Musical Blackbirds, The, 42
- 5 Red Caps, The, 5, 123–27, 132–34,  
137–40, 142, 144–45, 152, 154–55, 157,  
164–67, 169, 171, 174–78, 180, 201,  
206–7, 220, 226, 228, 232, 244, 250,  
254, 259, 263, 297
- Fleet, William “Biddy,” 182
- Florence, Nellie, 49
- Flores, John, 292
- Flyright Records, 227, 298
- Foley, Fred, 218
- Folkways Records, 159
- For Men Only*, 276, 283, 299
- Ford, Viki, 281
- Foresythe, Reginald, 67, 74–75, 81, 134, 251
- Forrest, Jimmy, 231
- Foster, Josh, 184
- Foster, Nat, 235, 240
- Foster, Pop, 150
- Four Alphabets, 230
- Fowler, Lem, 19, 35, 45, 243
- Fox, Ted, 233
- Frances, Panama, 226, 232, 236, 242, 248,  
262–63, 267
- Franzella, Sal, 187, 213
- Frederick, Conrad, 235, 245, 248, 281–  
82
- Freed, Alan, 254, 256, 264–65, 287
- Freeman, Bud, 74, 81
- Fuller, Blind Boy, 96, 129
- Fuller, Bob, xviii, 21–22, 29, 31, 39, 42
- Furness, Slim, 141, 145
- Galilee Singers, The, 158, 171, 180,  
219
- Garber, Jan, 215
- Gardner, Julia, 298
- Gardner, Vernon, 219
- Gemini Records, 299
- Gennett, Clarence, 184
- Gennett, Harry, 184
- Gennett Records (Richmond, Indiana),  
5, 11, 15, 17–18, 22, 130, 135, 143, 150,  
161, 183–84, 190
- Georgia Music Company (Corporation),  
73, 80, 99–100, 105, 110, 144, 163, 197,  
283
- Gibson, Ginny, 224, 260, 290
- Gibson, Glenn, 245, 276
- Gibson, Jockey Jack, 287
- Gibson, Steven A., 97, 126, 133, 157, 164,  
168, 206, 219, 250, 263
- Gifford, Gene, 81
- Gillespie, Dizzy, 254, 263
- Gillum, Jazz, 210
- Giobbbe, Felix, 186, 213, 215
- Girlesque*, 281
- Givens, Grace and Gloria, 234
- Glinn, Lillian, 48
- Godfrey, Arthur, 233
- Godfrey, “Sir” John, 188–89
- God’s Children, 247
- Golden Gate Quartet, 120, 235
- Goldentones, 256
- Goldwater, Barry, 204
- Goodman, Benny, 51, 69, 87, 131, 168,  
221, 246
- Goody, Sam, 292–93
- Gotham Records, 219, 292–93
- Gotham Studio, 298

- Gottuso, Tony, 219, 234, 241–42, 248  
 Graham, Annie C., 158, 162  
 Graham, Billy, 248  
 Grainger, Porter, 27, 45–46, 51, 73, 97, 121, 157–58, 261  
 Grainger, Portia, 261  
 Grappelly, Stephane, 148, 195, 298  
 Green, Eddie, 82, 209–10  
 Grice, Thomas “Baby,” xviii, 16, 19–20, 33, 42  
 Griffin, LeRoy, 261  
 Grimes, John, 271  
 Grofe, Ferdie, 15, 29, 81  
 Gross, Helen, xvii, xviii, 20, 25  
 Gross, Mike, 288  
 Guarnieri, Johnny, 91, 131  
 Gulick, Betty, 12–13  
  
 Hacklin, Joan, 281  
 Hadley, Dardanelle, 280  
 Haggart, Bob, 142, 147, 152, 163, 166, 246, 275, 281  
 Hale’s Kentucky Mountaineers, 119  
 Halique, Lady, 302  
 Hall, Al, 182  
 Hall, Ed, 150  
 Hallway House Dance Orchestra, 53  
 Hammond, John, 98, 297–98  
 Hampden Music Club, 263  
 Handy, W. C., xiv, 7, 9, 39, 42, 66, 150–51, 179, 202, 221, 303  
 Handy Brothers Music, 42  
 Hanlon, Alan, 234, 241  
 Hardin, Lane, 80, 100  
 Hardin, Louis Thomas, 264  
 Hardwick, Cedric, 147  
 Hare, Ernest, 7  
 Harlem Record Label, 182  
 Harmony Records, 44  
 Harris, Brandon, 279  
 Harris, Otis, 54  
 Harris, William, 144  
 Harris, Wynonie, 256  
 Harrison, Rae, 299  
 Hart, Clyde, 135, 145  
 Hawkins, Bill, 247  
 Hawkins, Coleman, 24, 30, 46, 145–46, 156, 165, 171, 174, 180, 189–90, 302  
 Hawkins, Erskine, 95, 117  
 Hayes, Billie, 117–18, 119, 121, 125, 150, 228  
 Hayes, Ernie, 255, 299  
 Haymes, Dick, 180  
 Haywood Henry Sextet, 297  
 Hayworth, Rita, 191  
 Heath, Joyce, 280  
 Henderson, Fletcher, 16, 18, 22, 39–40, 42, 81, 85–86, 94  
 Henderson, Horace, 85–86  
 Henderson, Rosa, 19, 22, 24–25, 40, 187  
 Hendrix, Jimi, 299  
 Henry, Haywood, 95, 255, 258–59, 263, 266, 272, 274, 296  
*Here’s Hope*, 290  
 Herman, Lenny, 217, 290  
 Hess, Norbert, 279  
 Higgenbotham, Irene, 111, 133, 142, 146, 152, 159, 166–67, 185, 207, 213, 222, 226, 228–30, 236, 238, 245, 251, 276  
 Higginbotham, J. C., 111, 150, 276  
 Hill, Alexander, 65–69, 71–73, 74, 77, 80, 91, 148, 182, 272  
 Hill, Elvie, 226  
 Hill, Teddy, 86  
 Hines, Earl, 81–92, 163  
 Hinton, Milt, 75, 165, 226, 232, 234–36, 238–39, 241, 253, 255, 262, 291  
 H.M.V., 250  
 Hodges, Johnny, 231  
 Hoey, Jerry, 275  
 Hogan, Granville, 290  
 Holiday, Billie, 221, 228  
 Holly, Buddy, 221  
 Holston, Georgia Lee, 234  
 Holt, Laverne, 257–59, 301  
 Holta, Enyatta, 259, 300  
 Hooper, Louis, xviii, 21–22, 29, 31–33, 35, 39, 42  
 Hoosier Hot Shots, 90  
 Hope, Elmo, viii, 290  
 Hopkins, Claude, 73, 81–82, 85, 91, 119, 221, 238



- Hopkins, Frank, 261, 266  
 Hopkins, Lightnin', 232  
 Hopkins, Linda, 263  
 Hopkins, Lyman, 261  
 Hopkins, Lyman, Jr., 261  
 Hornsby, Dan, 49, 59  
 Hot Quintette of France, 180  
 Houston, Bob, 215  
 Howard, Eddy, 215  
 Hucko, Peanuts, 246  
 Hudco Records, 259  
 Huey Richard, 165  
 Hulbert, T. Alexander, 238  
 Humes, Helen, 46  
 Hunter, Ivory Joe, 223, 240  
 Hurricane Club, 265  
 Hurston, Zora Neale, 127–29  
 Hylton, Jake, 221  
*Hymns of Faith*, 280  
  
*I Love You Truly*, 272  
 Imperial Records, 289, 298  
*Instant Sex*, 298  
 Internal Revenue Service, 274  
 Irish Barn Dance Boys, 149  
 Iznaga, Alberto, 179  
  
 Jackson, Cliff, 26, 38–39, 41, 121  
 Jackson, Mahalia, 211  
 Jackson, Wesley, 235  
 Jackson Blue Boys (Charlie McCoy,  
   Walter Vincent, Bo Carter), 53  
 Jagelks, Charles Matthew (Chuck  
   Wayne), 152  
 James, Elmore, 292  
 James, Harry, 98, 149, 180, 187, 208  
 James Tyler Orchestra, 277  
 Jay-Dee Records, 207, 240, 244, 249, 277  
 Jefferson, Hilton, 145–46, 165  
 Jerome, Henry, 214  
 Joe Davis Music, 22, 28, 95, 99, 102, 201,  
   207, 278  
 Joe Davis Records, 144, 148, 155–56  
 Johnson, Beach, 217  
 Johnson, Blind Willie, 54  
 Johnson, Budd, 133, 135–36  
 Johnson, Eldridge, 36  
 Johnson, Flora, 248  
 Johnson, Freddy, 299  
 Johnson, Gladys, 16  
 Johnson, Harold, 249, 252–53, 260  
 Johnson, J. C., 15, 47, 50–51, 71–73, 87,  
   90, 186, 276  
 Johnson, J. Rosamund, 66  
 Johnson, James P. (Jimmy), 63–64, 77,  
   91, 96–97  
 Johnson, James Weldon, 66  
 Johnson, Lem, 236–38  
 Johnson, Lonnie, 46, 60, 71, 129, 248,  
   289–90, 303  
 Johnson, Robert, 128, 285  
 Jones, Duke, 141  
 Jones, Jo, 136  
 Jones, Jonah, 145–46  
 Jones, Lynwood, 141  
 Jones, Maggie, 24, 40  
 Jones, Ollie, 239  
 Jones, Philly Jo, 290  
 Jones, Quincy, 256  
 Jones, Rinky Scott, 247  
 Jones, Spike, 98  
 Jones, Wilmore “Slick,” 182  
 Jordan, Genevieve, 18  
 Jordan, Louis, 102, 142, 236  
 Jordan, Taft, 221, 227, 229, 232, 235, 256,  
   291  
 Joseph M. Davis Company, 52  
 Jubilee Male Quartet, 149, 179  
 Jubileers, 180  
 Jump Town Orchestra, 247  
 Jungle Town Stompers, 32  
  
 Kaminstein, Abraham J., 266–67  
 Kamman, Lee, 246  
 Kansas City Five, 23  
 Kapp, Bertha (Davis), 104, 245  
 Kapp, Dave, 103–4, 213  
 Kapp, Jack, 72, 92, 97, 209  
 Kaufman, Irving, 39, 44, 116, 243, 255,  
   301  
 Kaye, Sammy, 149, 180, 201  
 KBLT, 248

- KDAQ, 288  
 Kee, Shirley, 234  
 Kelley, Peck, 103  
 Kelly, Wayne, 300  
 Kelton, Frank, 218  
 Kelway Records, 239, 300  
 Kenon, Abner, 256  
 Kentucky Club, 34  
 Kern, Jerome, 66  
 Keyes, Bert, 227, 330  
 Keyes, Lawrence "88," 162, 184, 186, 229  
 Keystone Blues Chasers, 228  
 KFRC, 229  
 Kidd, Jim, 297  
 Killoran, Pat, 149  
 King, Al, 231, 236, 265, 271  
 King Houdini, 258  
 King Records, 289  
 Kirkeby, Ed, 72, 220, 250  
 Kirkland, Leroy, 118, 254–56  
 Klickman, F. Henri, 226, 229  
 Knight, Evelyn, 209  
 Koester, Bob, viii, ix  
 Korn Kobbler, 154–55, 174, 180  
 Krazy Kat Records, 164  
 Krupa, Gene, 51  
 Kundstat, Len, 30, 41, 297, 299  
 KYW, 212  
  
 Ladnier, Tommy, 299  
 Lang, Irving, 152  
 Larry Lucie Orchestra, 299  
*Latin-American Rhythms*, 198  
 Laughin' Charlie (Charlie Hicks), 48  
 LaVere, Steve, 298  
 Lawrence, Brian, 275  
 Lawson, Yank, 163  
 Leach, Lillian, 249, 253, 260  
 Leadbetter, Mike, 298  
 Lee, Charles, 169  
 Leeman, Cliff, 246  
 Leiber, Jerry, 274  
 Lennie Herman Quintet, 212  
 "Let That Be a Lesson to You," 246  
 Letz, Al, 281  
 Levine, Henry, 215  
  
 Lewis, Meade Lux, 149  
 Lewis, Ted, 69, 71, 75  
 Lewis, Vic, 218  
 Liberty Records, 289  
 Library of Congress, xii, 127  
 Lindsay, William, 243, 245  
 Lisbona, Eddie, 246, 275  
 Liston, Virginia, 19  
*Little Spice, A*, 272, 276  
*Live a Little, Love a Little*, 289  
 Livingston, Fud, 169  
 Lomax, Alan, 127–28  
 London Records, 214  
 Longshaw, Fred, 41  
 Lonoue, Conrad, 152  
 Lopez, Vincent, 208, 214  
 Lord Caresser, 282  
 Louisiana Five, 9, 255  
 Lovelle, Herbie, 291, 293  
 Lowe, Harry, 247  
 Lowe, Mundell, 243, 245  
 Lowe, Sammy, 271  
 Lucas, Al, 271, 285, 291  
 Lucas, Buddy, 231  
 Lucas, Jane, 150  
 Lucie, Larry, 281, 292–93, 299  
 Lucky, Warren, 254–55, 259, 262–63  
 Lunceford, Jimmy, 224  
 Lynch, Carl, 291  
 Lynn, Vera, 275  
 Lyon, Herbert, 282–83  
 Lytell, Jimmy, 106, 113, 118, 185  
  
 Madigan, Betty, 217–18, 245  
 Madison, Bingie, 150  
 Magnolia Five, The, 207, 250  
 Magnolia Trio, 169  
 Magnusson, Clarence, 218  
 Mahones, Gildo, 188  
 Manhattan Mellowtones, 186  
 Manning, Sam, 27–28  
 Manone, Wingy, 81, 87, 91, 148, 152–53, 165–67, 171, 189, 215, 226, 251, 276  
 Manor Records, 219, 225  
 Mansfield, Joan, 281  
 Marilyn Music Publishers, 270

- Marsala, Joe, 87, 152–53  
 Marshall, Joe, 291  
 Marshall, Neil, 187  
 Martin, Daisy, 11–12  
 Martin, Kelly, 231  
 Martin, Sara, 19  
 Martinez, Cliff, 230, 242  
 Mastertone Studio, 246, 248, 254–57, 262,  
     265, 267, 272, 275, 280, 283–84, 291  
 Mastren, Carmen, 113  
 Mathews, Emmitt, 174–75  
 Matson, Charlie, 24  
 Matthews, George, 231–32  
 Maxted, Billy, 213  
 Mazor, Barry, 304  
 McClean, Al, 184  
 McClennan, Tommy, 172  
 McCormick, Mack, 127  
 McCoy, Viola, 25, 41, 59  
 McGarity, Lou, 169–70, 246, 275  
 McGhee, Johnny, 179, 248  
 McGravy Brothers, 180  
 McMichen, Clayton, 119, 122, 144, 165–  
     66, 171, 180  
 McPartland, Jimmy, 218  
 McPartland, Marian, 218  
 McRae, Dave, 221, 238, 256  
 McRae, Teddy, 165  
 McTell, Blind Willie, 172  
 Mecca, Tony, 290  
 Melford Record Company, 219, 231  
 Mellows, 249, 252–54, 260–61, 266  
*Melody Maker* (magazine), 64  
 Melrose, Lester, 159, 172, 195, 197  
*Memphis Bound*, 182  
 Men of Passion, 281  
 Mendelsohn, Fred, 172  
 Mercado, Cuateto Hermanos, 180  
 Mercer, Johnny, 179  
 Mercury Records, 202–3, 209, 214  
 Merriday, Eugene, 241  
 Merrill, Reggie, 169  
 Merrill, Walter W., 168  
 Mesnes Music Publishing, 216  
 Metcalfe, Louis, 281, 299  
 Meyers, Hazel, 22, 302  
 Meyerson, Harry, 209  
 MGM Records, 185, 191, 206–9, 214, 218,  
     222–26, 228–31, 234–36, 238–40, 244,  
     259, 265  
 Michelson, Robert, 177  
 Miles, Josie, 16–18, 21–25  
 Miles, Lizzie, 13–14, 32, 187  
*Miles Ahead*, 256  
 Milestone Records, 302  
 Miley, Bubber, 10–11, 15–16, 22–23, 26,  
     31, 34, 186  
 Miller, Bob, 13, 30, 59  
 Miller, Eddie “Piano,” 274, 277, 290  
 Miller, J. D., 78  
 Miller, Mitch, 209  
 Millinder, Lucky, 106  
 Mills, Irving, 60  
 Mills Brothers, 209, 215  
 Mingus, Charles, 242  
 Mississippi Shieks, 78  
 Modern Recording Studios, 214  
 Mole, Miff, 35  
 Molina, Carlos, 179  
 Monero, Jose Luis, 180  
 Monk, Thelonious Sphere, 30, 146, 254,  
     268, 302  
 Montgomery Ward, 197  
 Moore, Bernie, 296  
 Moore, Hal, 302  
 Moore, Monette, 22, 32, 40, 187, 276  
 Morehouse, Chauncey, 113  
 Morris, Joe, 188–89  
 Morrison, Peck, 255  
 Morton, Benny, 221  
 Morton, Jelly Roll, 29, 50, 168, 182  
 Moss, S. F., 243  
 Moten, Bennie, 189  
*Mr. Honky Tonk*, 290  
 Murphy, Rose, 209  
 Murray and Silver, 140  
 Murtaugh, Henry, 185  
 Musicraft Records, 254  
 Mutually Owned Society for  
     Songwriters, Inc., 243  
*My Mother’s Lullaby*, 12  
*My Pussy Belongs to Daddy*, 292

- Nance, Ray, 136  
 Napoleon, Phil, 35, 68, 185, 187, 212–13  
 Nardy, Joe, 218  
 Nat Nazarro Management Agency, 133, 142, 152  
 National Records, 239  
 Naturals, The, 282, 285  
 Nest Club, 297, 299  
*Never Sell a Copyright*, vii, 88, 303  
 New Horizon Records, 285  
 New Orleans Owls, 40  
 New Orleans Rhythm Kings, 144  
 Newman, Ralph M., 279  
 Newton, Larry, 224  
 Nichols, Muriel (Bea Booze), 182  
 Nichols, Red, 35, 71, 73  
 Nixon, Ted, 297  
 Noone, Jimmie, 65  
 Norfolk Jubilee Quartet, 179, 230  
 Norman, Fred, 221–22, 226, 229, 231, 234, 238, 241  
 Normanaires, 222  
 Norris, Al, 141  
  
 Oberstein, Eli, 80, 96, 149, 179, 195, 197, 208, 210, 214, 303–4  
 O'Day, Judy, 272  
 O'Hare, "Husk," 14–15  
 OKeh Record Company, 8–9, 11–13, 28, 32, 38–40, 43–44, 46, 55, 67, 98, 105, 143, 159, 161–62, 172, 177  
 Olivella, Phil, 213  
 Oliver, King, 30, 45, 48, 65, 70, 135, 144, 156, 182  
 Oliver, Thelma, 293  
 Orchard, Frank, 152–53  
 Original Dixieland Jazz Band, 9, 213, 269  
 Original Memphis Five, 68, 177, 185  
 Orioles, The, 233  
  
 Pace, Harry, 17  
 Pace & Handy Music, 7, 42  
 Pageants, The, 292, 297  
 Palda Records, 219  
 Pappas, James, 272  
*Para Hombres*, 283  
  
 Paramount Records, 27, 149, 162, 175, 230  
 Park Avenue Trio, 157, 163  
 Park Lane Trio, 185  
 Parker, Charlie, 165  
 Parks, Rosa, 258  
 Parody Record Company, 270  
 Pathe Records, 6, 16, 42, 86  
 Pathe/Perfect Records, 22, 40  
 Patillo, Dave, 126, 157  
 Patriots, 291  
 Peer, Ralph, 303–4  
 Pearce, Jan, 149, 180, 198, 201  
 Pemberton, Bill, 258  
 Penny, Hank, 95–96  
 Percy, Joel, 226  
 Perri, Danny, 221  
 Persoff, Sam, 215  
 Peter, Saul T., 285  
 Petrillo, James C., 112, 194–95, 202  
 Pettiford, Oscar, 135  
 Phil Ellis Choir, 241  
 Phillips, Sam, 303  
 Phillips, Washington, 54  
*Piano Party*, 277  
 Piano Red, 235  
 Pierce, Andy, and the Song Spinners, 217  
 Pinkard, Maceo, 29, 66  
 Plange, David K., 243  
 Plantation Singers, 179  
 Platters, The, 268  
*Play Girl*, 282  
 Polka Dots, 117  
 Ponce, Phil, 72, 78  
 Powell, Specs, 165  
 Preer, Evelyn, 42  
 Presley, Elvis, 222, 273, 279, 289  
 Prestige Records, 298  
*Price Is Right, The*, 291  
 Producers Recording Company, Inc., 179  
 Professor Bop, 287  
 Progressive Music Publishers, 270  
 Pruitt, Carl, 270  
 Pullum, Joe, 77  
 Pumiglio, Pete, 154

- Purvis, Jack, 66–67  
*Pussy Galore*, 281  
 Pyramid International Corporation, 189  
 Pyramids, The, 270–71
- QRS Records, 59, 62  
 Que Records, 298  
 Quinn, Joe, 251–52  
 Quinn, William, 149, 168, 181  
 Quinn's Dublin Orchestra, 149, 181  
 Quintette of the Hot Club of France,  
     148, 168, 298
- Rafael Seijo Trio, 180  
 Ragas, Henry, 269  
 Rainbow, The, 215  
 Rainbow Records, 212, 214, 255  
 Raleigh Music Publishers, 270  
 Randolph, Zilner T., 98–99, 103  
 Rayons, The, 285  
 Razaf, Andy (Andriamanantena Paul  
     Razafinkarefo), 29–31, 37, 40, 42–43,  
     47, 50–51, 55–58, 60–61, 64–66,  
     71–72, 74–75, 78–80, 83, 86, 88, 91,  
     96–98, 99, 102–3, 105, 110, 112, 131,  
     148, 166, 181–82, 185, 192, 244–45, 272,  
     276, 280, 285  
 RCA Studio, 210, 213, 215  
 RCA Victor, 36, 96, 105, 137, 142, 168,  
     195–98, 209–10, 213, 215, 219, 222–23,  
     242, 270, 273, 278–79, 283  
 RCA's Custom Record Sales Section, 210  
 Reco-Art Sound Studio, 225, 227  
 Record Trust Syndicate, 119, 122, 148–  
     49, 154, 168, 179–80  
 Redd, Freddie, 188  
 Redditt, Irving, 260  
 Redfield (Davis), Eileen, 223, 226–29  
 Redman, Don, 65, 73  
 Redman, Paul, 187  
 Reeves, Barbara, 292  
 Regal Record Company, 172  
 Reinhardt, Django, 148, 298  
 Rene Brothers, 203  
 Richards, Charles B., 186  
 Richardson, Wally, 285
- Richmonde, Faye, 266, 271–77, 280–82,  
     291, 294, 299–300  
 Ricketts, Bob, 15, 23  
 Riley, Melvin, 292  
 Rivers, Walter, 209  
 Roach, Max, 254  
 Robbins Music, 178  
 Robinson, Basil "Bass," 136, 146  
 Robinson, Bobbie, 292  
 Robinson, J. Russell, 45, 78, 82, 87, 187  
 Robinson, Milt, 298  
 Robison, Carson, 27, 39, 50, 59, 76, 90,  
     110, 119–20, 125, 134, 140  
 Rocco, Joe, 300  
 Rodgers, Gene, 132, 156–57, 165  
 Roisman, Charles, 220, 225, 235, 295  
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 160  
 Rose, Fred, 82, 87  
 Rosenkrantz, Timme, 101  
 Rouse, Charlie, 254  
 Royal Crown Cola, 231  
 Royal Crown Records, 266  
 Royals Crowns, The, 231  
 Rubin, Ada, 84  
 Rushing, Jimmy, 256  
 Russell, Al, 117  
 Russell, Jane, 272  
 Russell, Luis, 30, 58, 66, 71, 73, 75, 150,  
     182  
 Russell, Nipsey, 263  
 Russell, Pee Wee, 72  
 Russo, Tony, 213  
 Ryan, Tommy, 201
- Sabrina Label, 249  
 Sacks, Mamie, 209  
 Saffer, Buddy, 165  
 Sampson, 121–24, 132, 136, 139–41, 154,  
     166–67, 180, 184, 213, 221, 228, 268  
 Sanella, Andy, 177–79, 181, 185  
*Santa Barbara*, 289  
 Saunders, Jimmy, 248  
 Sauter-Finnegan Band, 269  
 Savoy Records, 131, 148, 181, 207, 219,  
     235  
 Scale-Tones, The, 261–63

- Schertzer, Hymie, 168  
 Scott, Babe, 260  
 Scott, Hazel, 131  
 Scott, Millicent, 185, 188  
 Scranton Record Company, 119, 148–49  
 Scruggs, Irene, 29, 45–46  
 Scrugs, Bugs, 287  
 Sears, Al, 243, 254  
 Sears, Zenas, 235  
 Sedic, Gene, 78, 182, 299  
*Sexarama*, 285  
 Shad, Bob, 203  
 Shalimar Music Publishers, 270, 273  
 Shavers, Charlie, 158  
 Shaw, Artie, 142, 151, 245–46  
 Shaw, Arvell, 243  
 Shawker, Norris “Bunny,” 221  
 Shawnee Records, 209  
 Shearing, George, 195  
 Shelton, Anne, 275  
 Shepard, Ollie, 97, 102  
 Shepard, Shep, 293  
 Shirley, Jimmy, 228, 256  
 Sholes, Steve, 209–10, 213, 222–23  
*Shuffle Along*, 41  
 Signature Records, 209  
 Signorelli, Frank, 113, 177–79, 185–87, 192, 213, 215, 220, 234, 242, 266, 269–71, 274, 277  
 Silloway, Ward, 166  
 Sinatra, Franklin, 150, 169  
 Singin’ Sam (Sam Frankel), 139–40, 144, 154, 178–80, 204–5  
 Singleton, Zutty, 72  
 Sissle, Noble, 301  
 Sittin’-In-With Records, 203  
 Skatin’ Tone Records, 214  
 Skidmore, Jimmy, 218  
 Slate Records, 285  
 Slim and Slam, 230  
 Smalls, Tommy, 264  
 Small’s Paradise, 255  
*Smarty Party Songs*, 292  
 Smeck, Roy, 171, 301  
 Smith, Arthur, 82, 204  
 Smith, Bessie, 39, 42–43, 46, 52, 59, 64, 121, 234, 272  
 Smith, Buster, 126  
 Smith, Chris, 9  
 Smith, Clara, xviii, 29, 37, 45, 59  
 Smith, Ethel, 191  
 Smith, Laura, xviii, 19  
 Smith, Mamie, 8–10, 13–14, 22, 24, 49, 234, 288, 297  
 Smith, Ruby, 96  
 Smith, Ulysses, 247  
 Smith, Willie “The Lion,” 95, 97, 102, 119–21  
 Sneed, James, 285  
 Sneed, Miriam, 285  
 Snow, Phoebe, 245  
 Snowden, Elmer, 20–23, 29, 31–32, 169, 297  
 Snyder, Terry “Bunny,” 222, 281  
 Solomon, Red, 221  
 Sonny Boy and Lonnie, 298  
 Sound Center Studio, 299  
*Sound of Music, The*, 293  
 Sousa, John Philip, 66  
 Southern Music, 80  
 Southern Wonder Quartet, 150, 179  
 Southernaires, 215  
 Spargo, Tony, 213  
 Sparks Brothers, 80  
 Sparks Records, 265  
 Sparrows, The, 241–42, 244, 271, 300  
 Spears, Basil, 223, 225, 228  
 Spivey, Victoria, 41, 52  
 Spotlight Club, 254  
 Spriggs, Dolores, 285  
 Spriggs, Jimmy, 126, 157  
 Stapleton, Charles, 285  
 Starlight Four Quartette, 219  
 Stash Records, 302  
 State Street Ramblers, 130  
 State Theater, 263  
 Steele, Nancy, 282  
 Stegmeyer, Bill, 142, 163  
 Stevens, Gilbert, 229–30, 231, 234–35, 241–42  
 Stevens, Haig, 113

- Stewart, Slam, 159  
 Stitt, Sonny, 242, 254  
 Stokes, Charles, 260  
 Stoller, Mike, 274  
 Stone, Lew, 221  
 Story, Chuck and Ella, 129, 140  
*Storyville*, vii, xii  
 Strauss, Johann, 185, 212  
 Strong, Vin, 223  
 Stump and Stumpy (James Cross and Harold Comer), 236  
 Sugar Daddy Birmingham, 287  
 Sullivan, Maxine, 121, 151–52, 165, 168, 215  
 Sun Records, 303  
 Sun Music Publishing, 137  
 Superdisc Records, 228  
 Supreme Records, 209, 224, 238  
 Svenska Filminstitutets Filmskola, 298  
 Svenson, Sven (Lenny Rogers), 291  
 Swan Record Company, 213  
 Sweatman, Wilbur, 5, 9, 25  
 Synthetic Plastics Record Corporation, 291  
  
*Talk of Hollywood, The*, 58  
 Tampa Red, 80, 198  
 Taps Agency, 172  
 Tate, Buddy, 221  
 Tate, Erskine, 266  
 Taubman, Paul, 215, 217, 224  
 Taylor, Billy, 159  
 Taylor, Danny, 270–71, 282, 289–90  
 Taylor, Eddie, 165  
 Taylor, Eva, 32, 51  
 Taylor, Fred, 235  
 Taylor, Sam “The Man,” 118, 223–24, 227, 229, 232, 235, 237–38, 243, 249, 256, 262–63, 266–69, 270  
 Teagarden, Jack, 61, 72, 246  
 Teicher, Louis, 221, 291  
 Temple, Shirley, 234  
 Tempo King and His Kings of Tempo, 84  
 Texas Blues Destroyers, 26  
 Theile, Bob, 209  
 Thomas, Joe, 222, 224  
 Thomas, Walter, 135, 139–41, 145–47, 154–55, 158–59, 165, 167–68, 180, 213, 215, 221, 225  
 Thornton, Betty, 102, 148, 162, 178, 181–82, 184, 186–87, 192, 215, 272, 276, 280  
 Three Monkey Chasers, The, 29  
 Three Suns, The, 180, 204  
 Three Tobacco Tags, 105  
 Thurmond, Strom, 204  
*Tit for Tat*, 280  
*To My Wife*, 277  
 Todd, Dick, 212, 214–15, 217  
 Tommy Levine Agency, 236  
 Townsend, Henry, 80  
 Traumbauer, Frankie, 35, 55, 113, 149, 151, 179, 185  
 Traylor, Rudy, 236, 238  
 Treadwell, George, 241  
 Treadwell, Irene, 241  
 Triangle Music Publishing Company, 5–19, 28, 30, 32–33, 39–50, 53, 57–58, 61–67, 138, 261  
 Trix Records, 173  
 Troob, Warren, 283  
 Trotman, Lloyd, 263, 267  
 Tubbs, Ernest, 142  
 Tucker, Sophie, 69, 272, 286  
 Tucker, Tommy, 179  
 Tunnell, George “Bon Bon,” 145, 147, 153, 157, 159, 162–63, 165, 167, 171, 174, 176–77, 180, 185, 201, 207, 219, 245, 300  
 Turner, Harold, 280  
 Turner, Roy J., 213  
 20th Century Records, 225  
  
 Uggams, Leslie, 224, 232–34, 241  
 United Broadcasting, 251  
 Universal Studios, 280  
 Ushan, Paula, 281, 283  
  
 Valjo Music, 274  
 Vallee, Rudy, 11, 51, 60, 68, 81, 86, 107–8, 288  
 Van Tosh, Nora, 281  
 Van Walls, Harry, 231–32, 236  
 Vance, Dicky, 221

- Variety Studio, 298  
 Varsity Records, 119, 149–51, 179, 188,  
 208, 210, 214  
 Vaughan, Frankie, 212  
 Vaughan, Sarah, 233  
 Vazques, Felix, 191  
 Ventura, Charlie, xi  
 Vickers, Laurie, 281  
 Victor, 41, 55, 65, 71, 75, 78, 80, 86, 131,  
 143, 214  
 Vidacovich, Pinky, 40, 45, 238, 287  
 Vidal, Raul, 180  
 Vitin Rivera y su Qunintette Lupini, 180  
 Vocalion Records, 38, 44, 47, 175
- WAAM, 37, 39  
 WABC, 133  
 Walker, Frank, 37, 39, 45, 53, 59, 70, 104,  
 223–24, 234–35  
 Walker, Kirby, 132–33, 141, 241  
 Walker, Lawrence, 107  
 Walker Brothers, 82  
 Wallace, Cedric, 151, 221  
 Wallace, David, 186  
 Waller, Maurice, 61, 68–69  
 Waller, Thomas “Fats,” viii, xii, 21, 28–29,  
 33, 43, 46–47, 55–65, 67–68, 81, 90–  
 92, 102, 107, 112, 114, 118, 131–32, 135,  
 148, 151, 175, 221, 225, 272  
 WALT, 235  
 Waner, Art, Orchestra, 217  
 Ware, Edward, 219  
 Warren, Edward “Butch,” 290  
 Warwick, Dionne, 233  
 Washboard Sam (Robert Brown), 172  
 Washington, Inez “Lady,” 280, 282  
 Washington, Joseph “Rocky,” 241  
 Waters, Ethel, xviii, 33, 39, 59, 272  
 Waters, Kitty, 42  
 Watkins, Viola, 229  
 Watson, Paula, 209, 224, 238–40  
 Wayne, Jerry, 168, 209, 224  
 WBBM, 214  
 WEAf, 68, 152  
 Weber, Joan, 281  
 WEBJ, 37, 42
- Webster, Ben, 135, 159, 190  
 Weiss, Harry, 242  
 Weldon, Frank, 78  
 Weldon, Sonny, 213  
 Welk, Lawrence, 214  
 Wells, Ludie, 16, 18  
 West, Mae, 40  
 Wettling, George, 142, 152–53, 166, 246,  
 275  
 WFBH, 36  
 WGBS, 37  
 WGST, 235  
 Wheeler, Claudia, 291  
 Wheeler, Doc, 267  
 Whitaker, Ruby, 261, 266  
 White, Beverly, 117, 119–21, 171, 174  
 White, Reuben, 261  
 Whiteman, Paul, 57, 60, 81, 154, 275  
 WHN, 37  
 WHYV, 219  
 Wiedoeft, Rudy, 11, 301  
 Wilcox, Eddie, 224  
 Wiley, Doc, 162  
 Williams, Al, 242–43, 256–58, 262,  
 271–72, 276, 280  
 Williams, Bert, 6, 9, 11, 98  
 Williams, Big Joe, 79, 96, 198  
 Williams, Clarence, xviii, xiv, 12, 19–20,  
 29, 32, 37, 40, 59, 66, 106–7  
 Williams, Courtney, 151–52  
 Williams, Earl, 299  
 Williams, Fess, 126, 148, 236  
 Williams, George, 35, 40  
 Williams, Harlem, 281  
 Williams, J. Mayo, 59, 99, 103, 158, 182  
 Williams, Spencer, 11, 14, 19, 26, 32,  
 42, 45, 48–49, 55, 58–60, 63, 65–67,  
 71–74, 82, 91, 100, 142, 185, 191, 298  
 Williams, Te Roy, 31–32, 297  
 Williams, Ted, 231–32  
 Williams, Teddy, 240  
 Williams, Tex, 218  
 Williamson, Sonny Boy, 96  
 Willis, William, 186  
 Wills, Bob, 95, 112  
 Wilson, Carter, 219



- Wilson, John, 260  
 Wilson, Shadow, 136  
 Wilson, Teddy, 156, 288  
 Wilson, Wesley, 59, 120  
 Wimbrow, Dale, 30  
 Wimby (Wimberley), Julius, 235  
 Winchell, Walter, 88  
 WIND, 212  
 Winder, Everett, 257  
 Winding, Kai, 221, 242, 288–89  
 WINS, 152, 264  
 WIP, 212, 225  
 WJW, 264  
 WJZ, 68, 215  
 WLW, 72  
 WMCA, 36, 152  
 WMSG, 36  
 WNEW, 152  
 WOKO, 37  
 Wooding, Sam, 18, 299  
 Woods, Marjorie, 169  
 WOR, 140, 221, 225, 227, 229, 231, 234,  
     236, 238  
*World Famous Accordion Duets*, 290  
*World Famous Dixieland Favorites*, 290  
*World Famous Hymns*, 290  
*World Famous Minstrel Shows*, 290  
*World Famous Organ Solos*, 290  
*World Famous Rhythm and Blues*  
     *Groups*, 290  
*World Famous Waltzes*, 290  
 WOV, 129  
 WPCH, 37  
 Wright, Billy, 235  
 Wright, Laurie, vii  
 Wright Music, 208  
 WRNY, 39  
 WSM, 218  
 WSPA, 203  
 WTMJ, 214  
 WTOP, 218  
 WTTG-TV, 217–18  
 WWL, 237, 287  
 WWRL, 266  
 Wyndham, Porter, 285  
 Wynn, Al, 299  
 Yamin, Jaime, 175–76, 179–80  
 Yaner, Milt, 159  
 Young, Barney, 136  
 Young, Marshall, 208  
 Young, Trummy, 147  
 Zurke, Bob, 141–42

Joe Davis, "The Melody Man"



New York street scene. Joe Davis, just right of center, faces the camera with some "Tin Pan Alley" friends.



Joe Davis with Rudy Vallee on the beach "In Hawaii By The Sea" or, perhaps, Coney Island.



Clara Smith. Notice "To My Pal Joe Davis"





Betty Gullick signs for Joe Davis.



Viola McCoy. Courtesy of Mark Berresford.



(BLUES SERIES)

# SWEET MAN JOE

"BLUES" SONG

BY  
"BUB" MILEY

Published by  
**JOE DAVIS MUSIC CO.**  
1658 Broadway New York City  
MADE IN U. S. A.

# CALALU BLUES

(A WEST INDIAN NOVELTY SONG)

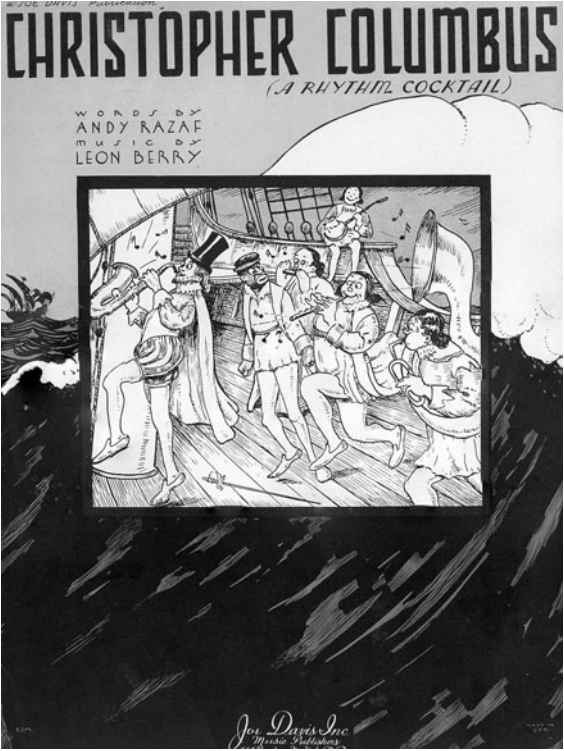
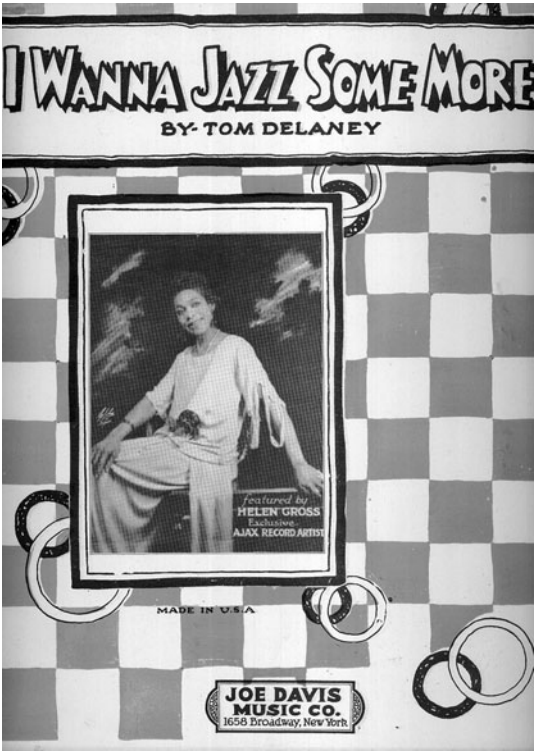
By  
**SAM MANNING**  
and  
**ARTHUR BOUCHER**

Published by  
**JOE DAVIS MUSIC CO.**  
1658 Broadway, New York

MADE IN U. S. A.



"I Wanna Jazz Some More" by Helen Gross



"Christopher Columbus" by Fletcher Henderson





## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP



To

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF COMPOSERS,  
AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS,~~35 West 43rd Street~~ 1501 B'way,  
NEW YORK CITYNew York, N. Y.  
City and State  
July 18 1932

The undersigned respectfully applies for membership in the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, as a Composer + Author, and agrees, if elected, to abide and be bound by the Constitution and By-laws of the said Society as now in force, or as may be hereafter amended.

The applicant is a citizen of United States and was born at New York City on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1896.

Musical works of which the applicant is Composer + Author are listed on the reverse side hereof, and it is understood that in the Society's ratings, in event of acceptance of this application, credit will be given the undersigned only upon such works as are composed, written and published by members of the said Society.

The applicant represents that there is in existence or effect no assignment, direct or indirect, of non-dramatic performing rights in or to any of the works listed herein, except as such may be in existence or effect with members of the said Society.

Proposed by

Spencer Williams

Seconded by

Thomas Waller

Signature

By

Joseph M. Davis

Address

Street and Number

Telephone

1658 Broadway, N.Y.C.Circle 7-1812

## DO NOT FILL IN THESE SPACES

Rec'd July 19th, 1932Subm't'd 192

Action

By

(NOTE: Be sure to keep the society advised of changes in address and telephone. Also notify society of all numbers published subsequent to the filing of this application.)

(OVER)



"California Blossom" by Louisiana Five



"Rambling Blues" by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band

# SPREAD YO' STUFF

"BLUES DE LUXE"

SONG



Words by AL BERNARD  
Music by JULES LEVY & PAUL CRANE

CHARLIE  
HIS NEXT  
FOR THE FIRST

WILL L. L. L.

"Spread Yo' Stuff" by Mamie Smith

A "JOE DAVIS" PUBLICATION

# SHAKE IT DOWN

(FOX-TROT SONG)

BY SPENCER WILLIAMS AND LOUIS URQUHART



*Peggy English*  
"Popular Photograph Record Artist"

With  
ukulele  
Arrangement

TRIANGLE  
1628  
1628  
1628

Made in  
U.S.A.

"Shake It Down" by Peggy English

# The United States of America



*To All To Whom These PRESENTS Shall Come:*

**This is to Certify** That by the records of the UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE it appears that **JOSEPH M. DAVIS, doing business as BEACON RECORD CO., of New York, N. Y.,**

did, on the **1st** day of **January, 1943**, duly file in said Office an application for REGISTRATION of a certain

## TRADE-MARK

shown in the drawing for the goods specified in the statement, copies of which drawing and statement are hereto annexed, and duly complied with the requirements of the law in such case made and provided, and with the regulations prescribed by the COMMISSIONER OF PATENTS.

And, upon due examination, it appearing that the said applicant **is** entitled to have said TRADE-MARK registered under the law, the said TRADE-MARK has been duly REGISTERED this day in the UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE, to

**Joseph M. Davis, doing business as Beacon Record Co., his heirs or assigns.**

This certificate shall remain in force for TWENTY YEARS, unless sooner terminated by law.

In Testimony Whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the PATENT OFFICE to be affixed, at the city of Washington, this twenty-seventh day of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and forty-three, and of the independence of the United States the one hundred and sixty-seventh.

*Conway P. Cox*  
Commissioner of Patents.

ATTEST:

*E. L. Reynolds*  
Law Examiner.







Erskine Buttergeld



The 6 Red Caps



# Contract Blank

## Associated Musicians of Greater New York LOCAL 802, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF MUSICIANS NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

THIS CONTRACT for the personal services of musicians, made this 30 day of August, 1944

between the undersigned employer (hereinafter called the employer) and 6 musicians (hereinafter called employees) represented by the undersigned representative. (Including Leader)

WITNESSETH, That the employer employs the personal services of the employees, as musicians severally, and the employees severally, through their representative, agree to render collectively to the employer services as musicians in the orchestra under the leadership of Robert Haggart, according to the following terms and conditions:

Name and Address of Place of Engagement WOR 1440 Broadway

Date(s) of Employment August 30, 1944

Hours of Employment 2-5 P.M.

of any over-time to be paid according to union scale

PRICE AGREED UPON \$ 210.00 (Terms and Amount)

To be paid within 10 days after date (Specify When Payments Are To Be Made)

The employer shall at all times have complete control of the services which the employees will render under the specifications of this contract. On behalf of the employer the Leader will distribute the amount received from the employer to the employees, including himself, as indicated on the opposite side of this contract, or in place thereof on separate memorandum supplied to the employer at or before the commencement of the employment hereunder and take and turn over to the employer receipts therefor from each employee, including himself. The amount paid to the Leader includes the cost of transportation, which will be reported by the Leader to the employer. The employer hereby authorizes the Leader on his behalf to replace any employee who by illness, absence, or for any other reason does not perform any or all of the services provided for under this contract. The agreement of the employees to perform is subject to proven detention by sickness, accidents, or accidents to means of transportation, riots, strikes, epidemics, acts of God, or any other legitimate conditions beyond the control of the employees. The employer agrees that the Business Representative of the Musicians' Local, in whose jurisdiction the musicians are playing, shall have access to the premises in which the musicians perform (except in private residences) for the purpose of conferring with the musicians. The musicians performing services under this contract must be members of the American Federation of Musicians and nothing in this contract shall ever be so construed as to interfere with any obligation which they may owe to the American Federation of Musicians.

It is agreed that all the rules, laws and regulations of the American Federation of Musicians, and all the rules, laws and regulations of the Local in whose jurisdiction the musicians perform, insofar as they are not in conflict with those of the Federation, are made part of this contract.

The employer represents that there does not exist against him, in favor of any employee-member of the American Federation of Musicians, any claim of any kind arising out of musical services rendered for any such employer. It is agreed that no employee-member of the American Federation of Musicians will be required to perform any provisions of this contract or to render any services for said employer as long as any such claim is unsatisfied or unpaid, in whole or in part. The employer in signing this contract himself, or having same signed by a representative, acknowledges his (her or their) authority to do so and hereby assumes liability for the amount stated herein.

Name of Employer Beacon Record Co.

Street Address 331 W. 51<sup>ST</sup>

City or State N. Y. C.

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

FORM B

44 Printed in U. S. A.

Accepted by Employer J. S. Davis, Owner

Accepted Robert Haggart Membership Card No. 1168  
(Orchestra Leader)

By \_\_\_\_\_

(Representatives of Employees)

William T. ...

1044







Dean Barlow with the Crickets



Dean Barlow with Alan Freed



Lillian Leech and The Mellows with Alan Freed



**WALTER THOMAS**

*EXCLUSIVE*

**"JOE DAVIS RECORD"**

*ARTIST*

Elmo Hope at the piano



Otis Blackwell



Jack Dupree

A "JOE DAVIS" publication

# Perhaps

## Song



Words by  
*Andy Razaf*  
Music by  
*Paul Denniker*  
Writers of  
*"S'posin'"*



MADE  
IN  
U.S.



"Qui sait"

**QUI SAIT. QUI SAIT. QUI SAIT**  
*paroles françaises*  
**JACQUES LARUE**  
*paroles espagnoles et musique de*  
**OSWALDO FARRES**

**"QUIZAS, QUIZAS, QUIZAS"**  
**"PERHAPS, PERHAPS, PERHAPS"**

**LES SŒURS ETIENNE**  
 DISQUE DECCA

**RICO'S CREOLE BAND**  
 DISQUE OCEAN  
 N° 8955

**HENRI LECH**  
 DISQUE POLYDOR

**EDDIE WARNER**  
 DISQUE ODEON

**ROBERTO SYLVA**  
 DISQUE CLEVER

**RAMON MENDIZABAL**  
 DISQUE ODEON  
 N° 1500

**FELIX VALVERT**  
 DISQUE PACIFIC 2244

**LUIS MARIANI**  
 DISQUE OCEANOPHONIE

**SOCIÉTÉ D'ÉDITIONS MUSICALES INTERNATIONALES**  
 POUR LA BELGIQUE  
**SOUTHERN BELGIUM**  
 13, Rue de la Chapelle/14  
 BRUXELLES

**S.E.M.I.**  
 5, Rue Lincoln - PARIS (8<sup>e</sup>)

POUR LA SUISSE  
**SOUTHERN A/G**  
 40, Stöckhofengasse  
 ZÜRICH

"Wer weiss"

**WER WEISS... WER WEISS... WER WEISS...**

**QUIZAS QUIZAS QUIZAS**  
**PERHAPS PERHAPS PERHAPS**

*Musik u. span. Text:*  
**OSWALDO FARRES**

*Deutscher Text:*  
**RALPH MARIA SIEGEL**

**WEST TON VERLAG G.M.B.H. BONN**

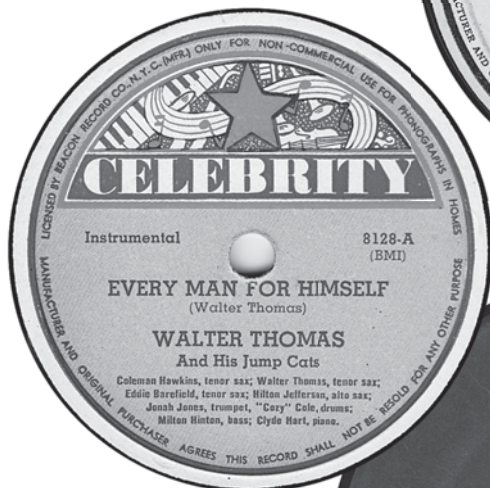
"Chissa"

**CHISSA, chissa, CHISSA**  
**(QUIZA, QUIZAS, QUIZAS) (PERHAPS, PERHAPS, PERHAPS)**  
**BOLERO**

**TESTO ITALIANO DI LARICI-TESTONI**  
**TESTO INGLESE DI JOE DAVIS**

**TESTO ORIGINALE E MUSICA DI**  
**OSWALDO FARRES**

**EDIZIONI SOUTHERN MUSIC**  
 Edizione di proprietà della MESSAGGERIE MUSICALE - MILANO









Cuarteto Tabú. 7820. *Left to right:* unknown, unknown (rear), Johnny Goicuría (in front of him), Benny, Saito. Thanks to Mariano Artau and Cristóbal Díaz Ayala.